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No. 719.] Week ending October 11th, 1902. [One Penny.

She did not see that poison was poured into Lord Ilden's flask.

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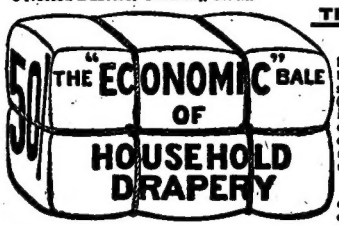

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By NOWELL CAY.

Author of "The Presumption of Stanley Hay, M.P."

CHAPTER I.

The Lady of the Bank Notes.

"You have lost something?" said Lord Ilden, and at the softly-spoken inquiry a pair of violet eyes looked up in startled surprise. Their owner had been wandering along the narrow woodland path with her gaze downcast and her attention so completely absorbed by her search that she had not even noticed the approach of a stranger.

Lord Ilden, coming home in the dusk with his gun on his shoulder, had enjoyed ample opportunity of admiring the gracefulness of the approaching figure. But in spite of his admiration the face turned up to his, surprised him by its soft, delicate beauty, and, although the ladies of his acquaintance were wont to complain that he was the least impressionable of young men, he coloured slightly as the violet eyes met his.

"Perhaps I can help you," he added, "if you will tell me what it is."

She answered without shyness, although her face was a shy one. It seemed to him that her anxiety left no room in her mind for any other emotion.

"I have lost two five-pound notes. I was careless enough to put them in the pocket of my dress, and I am afraid that I must have drawn them out with my handkerchief."

"When did you notice your loss?" he asked.

"About half-an-hour ago just at the end of the path. I have been searching here ever since." Her prettily modulated voice trembled slightly, and Lord Ilden sighed. He was not fond of the society of women, even when they were very young and very pretty, as this forlorn maiden was, and he felt that he had committed himself. Her evident acceptance of his help made it necessary that he should search up and down the coppice with her until her property was found.

"You think that you lost the notes on this path, then?" he asked.

"Yes; I am sure that I did not touch my pocket till I got here, and I had been walking up and down the path for some time when I missed them."

It occurred to him that this was rather a curious proceeding; but he was not an inquisitive man, and the only duty before him was to find her lost property.

"And when did you last notice the bank-notes safe in your pocket?"

"When I left the Rectory. I have been governess to Mrs. Haydon's children, and the ten pounds was my salary for half a year."

"Indeed!" said Ilden, wondering that anybody should work half a year for such a small sum. "Then, of course, it would not do for you to lose the money. Are you sure that you did not drop it in the road?"

"No; I have been back once to the house. If I lost the notes on the highway somebody must have picked them up. But I think they must be here."

Once more her voice trembled.

"If so, they are safe till to-morrow," said Ilden. "It is almost too dark to see now. Would it not be better to resume your search in the morning?"

"I am going away very early. I must find my money this evening."

Ilden sighed resignedly.

"Then we must make the best use of what little light there is. I will walk this way, if you will walk that. How were the notes folded?"

He started towards the road with a full description, so far as she could give it, and in less than ten minutes rejoined her at the point where they had parted, holding something between his fingers.

"I thought that I should manage to find them if they were in the coppice," he said, handing her two crumpled-up bank notes, and her face flushed with radiant relief.

"How shall I ever thank you? It was all the money that I have in the world," she cried impulsively, as she unfolded the crisp sheets.

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Ilden watched her uneasily, glad that the gathering darkness made her scrutiny a merely formal one.

"You must be more careful with your property in future," he said, perfunctorily, and she answered with a pretty little laugh of relief:

"You may be quite sure that I shall. I do not know what I should have done but for your kindness. I thought I had searched the path completely. Where did you find the notes?"

"Oh, quite close to the road," he said, quickly. "Good evening."

The girl held out her hand rather diffidently.

"I should like to know who it is that I am thanking. I shall never forget how much I owe to your kindness."

Ilden glanced at the face, radiant now with gratitude, and felt more than ever uneasy.

"I would rather not tell you, if you don't mind. If you should ever guess the reason, please oblige me by giving my refusal its full significance."

He had accompanied her to the end of the path where it joined the road by way of a kissing-gate, and bid her "good-bye" there. He seemed anxious to cut short her renewed thanks and get away.

But when her graceful figure had disappeared round a curve of the road, he was in no haste to resume his interrupted journey to the house. Instead he began searching the path again, more earnestly than before, stopping first to discover in which direction the wind was blowing, and entering the coppice on the leeward side of the path.

"If she found it out, it would be the best way out of the difficulty," he said to himself.

Among the young firs of the coppice it was too dark for any search to have much chance of success, but Ilden was a believer in his own luck, and a certain cynical doubt in his own mind made him unwilling to postpone the search till morning.

It was not until the rapidly-increasing gloom made his obstinacy ridiculous that he ceased to peer among the fallen pine needles, and he was turning to regain the path when the sight of something white at his feet made him stoop with the idea that success had attended his efforts just at the moment when he was admitting himself beaten.

He was loth to relinquish the idea when the feel of the ball of paper he had picked up suggested disappointment, and he put down his gun to strike a vesta and examine it more closely.

Yes, it was only a torn envelope which somebody had crushed into a ball and thrown away among the firs as they passed through the coppice, and the young man was about to toss it back when he was struck by a coincidence. The name and address upon it were his own.

He wondered how it could have come there when he certainly had no recollection of having thrown it away.

A second examination made him realise that he had never even received it. The writing, a prettily-formed woman's hand, was unfamiliar to him. The postmark showed that it had been posted at Lallerton, a place of which he had never heard.

And yet there was the address written plainly enough: "Lord Ilden, care of Hon. Jasper Ilden, Pennybrook Hall, Yorkshire," and the date on the postmark showed that it had been dispatched only three days ago.

Ilden knitted his brows in perplexity.

"I wonder if the inclosure is here among the firs too," he said to himself, but it was plainly too dark now to think of searching on such a slender chance, and he was putting the mysterious envelope carefully away in his pocket and deciding on a twofold search in the morning, when a sound made him stop abruptly, listening, and peering into the obscurity around him. It seemed to him as if he had heard a stealthy movement among the trees, and the remembrance of two recent incidents that might easily have proved tragic ones, made his attention instantly alert.

But in this case it seemed as if he had allowed fancy to play tricks with his imagination, for tensely as he listened he could hear no repetition of the sound. The coppice in its veil of darkness was as silent as death.

"It was nothing," said Ilden to himself, and he put a cigarette between his lips and struck a vesta to light it, preparatory to shouldering his gun again, and resuming his interrupted tramp to the house beyond the coppice.

But the next moment he had blown out the match hurriedly. For, as if some hidden foe had waited for its light to show his exact position, a bullet had come whizzing past his head to bury itself in the tree behind.

Ilden dropped promptly on one knee, and reaching out for his gun got it ready to fire back if the shot were repeated. The attack had been so unexpected that he had only the vaguest idea of the direction from which it had come, and to fire at random would only be to discover his own position to the hidden enemy.

His face, as he waited, expressed no surprise, only a keen intentness. One would have thought, indeed, from the quickness with which he had accepted the position that the attack on his life had been expected. If it had succeeded, his unseen assailant, whoever it might be, would no doubt have pleaded an accident. A man may fire at a stray bird in a coppice without imagining that a peer of the realm is wandering among the trees to receive the bullet from his gun.

Ilden could easily imagine the excuse, but he was determined that if a mistake was to be made it should be his. His fingers twitched to pull the trigger, and when five minutes had gone by without a sound or movement, he struck another match with his left hand against a tree, and held it at arm's length above him.

But the challenge was not accepted. Either his assailant had gone or feared to fire again after putting him on his guard, and after waiting another five minutes Ilden rose and stretched himself.

As he did so the kissing-gate at the end of the path clicked. Somebody was entering it from the road, and the young man stood to await their arrival. He was far from being a nervous man, but it seemed to him that it would be just as well to have a companion through the coppice.

The footsteps were approaching hastily, and he was able to distinguish now the figure of a lady approaching. He was scarcely surprised to find it to be the lady of the lost bank-notes. From the moment of leaving her he had been haunted by an uneasy fear that she might come back.

"Oh, I am so glad to find you," she exclaimed impulsively, as she recognised his tall figure in the gloom, "I was afraid that you had gone."

Ilden glanced uneasily over his shoulder.

"Let us get out on the road, and you shall tell me why you are so flatteringly eager to see me."

"I have brought you back your bank-notes."

"Mine?" he said, uneasily.

"Yes, you gave them to me. It was very, very kind of you, but——"

"What makes you think that I should have been so very deceitful?" he interrupted hopelessly, and smiled grimly to himself when he found all chance of subterfuge at an end.

"Because mine were never lost," said the governess. "I found them in my room when I got back to the Rectory, although I felt so sure that I had put them in my pocket."

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Ilden laughed, although he was feeling very uncomfortable at the exposure of his artifice.

"Then I am afraid that I cannot attempt to defend myself. But—well, the money seemed so important to you, and it made no difference to me. I happened to have the two notes in my pocket—a tempting coincidence, and, besides, I thought that I should very probably find yours in the morning."

"You are the kindest man that I have ever known," she said, with her heart in her voice, "and you would not tell me your name for fear that I should find out the notes were not mine and return them. I may know it now?"

"If you wish. I am Lord Ilden."

They had reached the gate now, but this time the young man did not turn. The coppice had become dangerous, and he had already determined to take the longer way by the road.

"Lord Ilden," she repeated, and the note of interest made him ask a question.

"You have heard my name before?"

"Yes, my brother used to speak of you a good deal. You were his hero at Rugby. Perhaps you remember Gerald Courthorpe?"

"Poor Courthorpe? Of course I do, and I was very much cut up when I heard of his death. And you are really his sister?"

His languid voice had suddenly become animated. He had been looking forward with resignation to the prospect of bearing her company as far as the Rectory and listening to her disturbing thanks all the way. Now the journey became all too short in his eyes, for he had been fond of Courthorpe, and the fact of his sister being compelled to accept a position as governess, and feel the loss of ten pounds as a tragedy, was dramatic enough to rouse all his interest. Courthorpe, when he knew him, had passed as the son of a very wealthy man, and he was eager, if he could, to ask an explanation of the change.

But Miss Courthorpe was wasting time by talking about himself.

"Your kindness to-night is just what I should have expected from you after all that Gerald told me about you," she said. "All his recollections were of your generosity; a generosity of which he said that you always seemed half ashamed. I remember how impressed I was as a little girl by the story of your expulsion from Rugby. You knew that the fault was another boy's—your cousin's—who had deliberately schemed to throw the blame on you; and yet you would not tell. Gerald and I thought it was noble."

"And I owed it to your brother that the truth was found out, and that I was recalled, while my cousin Percival got his deserts. He was a capital friend, your poor brother; and it is very interesting to meet his sister. Let me see, your name is Florence, is it not? But you said that you were staying at the Rectory here. I hope you have not lost your father as well as your brother?"

He had noticed for the first time that she was wearing mourning, which at this date could not be for her brother.

"He died nine months ago," she said. "I thought you would have seen it in the papers. He lost all his money, and the shock killed him."

"I am very sorry," said Ilden, very sincerely. "I have been abroad and heard nothing. How very sad. You are quite alone in the world, are you not?"

"Yes. Mrs. Haydon, who knew my mother many years ago, very kindly gave me the position of governess; but——" She hesitated. "I am leaving her and going to a fresh situation to-morrow."

Ilden winced at the word "situation." It seemed to him an outrageous one for the lips of a lady whose brother had been his friend. It seemed more outrageous still that he, with so much more money than he wanted, could do nothing to make the trumpery twenty pounds a year for which she worked ridiculous and unneccessary. But what could he do? Plainly nothing, and he remained silent, while Florence ran on, talking with a matter-of-fact simplicity which seemed to him heroic, about the difficulty she had encountered in finding a situation at all.

He was racking his brains to think how he could help her, and had arrived at no solution of the problem when they approached the Rectory gate to find a pompous and fiery-faced little lady on the look out there. Her sharp voice, which was none the less acid when she saw the governess accompanied by a masculine escort, sounded shrilly before they reached her, announcing the lateness of the hour in indignant tones, and the girl bid Ilden good-bye hurriedly to join her. He could hear her employer's voice raised in querulous complaint as they disappeared up the garden path together, and he went on his way feeling more than ever concerned for her.

It was not until he was entering the dark drive which led to Pennybrook Hall that he remembered the attempt which had been made on his life and allowed his thoughts to return to his own affairs which the attempt had made engrossing.

"That makes the third," he said to himself. "The game becomes exciting."

CHAPTER II.

"Three Attempts have been Made on my Life."

Pennybrook Hall where Lord Ilden was staying, was the much mortgaged and encumbered residence of his father's step-brother, the Honourable Jasper Ilden, and was at present the scene of a family reunion. After the death of his father, Ilden had travelled abroad for a couple of years. Now on his return, a round of visits had ended in his stay at his uncle's, where he found himself surrounded by his relatives. For the house party included his other paternal uncle, the Honourable Rupert, with his family. Not that Ilden found much pleasure in their society. His host was a good-natured dipsomaniac, who seemed intent on drinking himself to death as rapidly as possible, and his wife whom he had taken off the stage was a vulgar and violent-tempered woman, who had not the grace to conceal her jealousy of her guest. She seemed to him unable to lose sight of the fact that but for his existence she would herself be Lady Ilden of Ilden Castle, and she discoursed openly on the injustice of the laws of inheritance which passed on a man's property and title to his son instead of his brother.

Rupert, the younger of his father's half-brothers, was a taciturn and reserved man who always seemed to his nephew a little "uncanny." His manner indeed suggested that strain of insanity which had discovered itself in his grandfather's second wife, the mother of Jasper and Rupert, but not, he was glad to think, of his own father. Of the Honourable Rupert's two sons, the eldest was the "Cousin Percival" whose unscrupulousness and cunning had gone so near to ruining Ilden's career at Rugby. A man of Lord Ilden's own age, and bearing no small resemblance to him, Percival Ilden had shown from his boyhood an over-ruling jealousy and dislike of the cousin who possessed all that his own ambition craved. His brother Grant being five years younger had never been Ilden's contemporary at college, and was comparatively a stranger to him. His cousin's only objection to him was that he wore his hair long and wrote poetry.

Between them came a sister who had persistently made love to her cousin, but during his absence abroad had prudently accepted the offer of a baronet. She and her husband, Sir Charles Barton, were included in the house-

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party, and Lady Barton had already told her cousin in confidence that her marriage was a mistake, and that her husband was a bear. The young man had shown himself very sympathetic, and Jane Barton's friendliness did not lessen his distaste for the society of his father's relatives.

Of his mother's relatives, on the contrary, he was very fond, and his stay at Pennybrook Hall would have been less bearable than it was but for the presence among the guests of his maternal aunt Lady Mary Hay and her daughter Catherine. Catherine and he had always been the best of friends, and her friendship had always been the more pleasing to him because, unlike Lady Barton, his Cousin Catherine had always treated him like a brother.

They were all seated with the rest of the guests round the long dining-table when Lord Ilden entered a few minutes late for dinner, and he glanced round at the faces of his father's relatives with a keen interest. Neither of his uncles gave any sign that they noticed his entrance, but it seemed to him that his cousin Percival had been watching the door for him, and noticed his arrival with some emotion either of annoyance or relief.

"This is the first time that I have ever known you unpunctual," he said across the table as Ilden took his seat.

"Yes, I have had an adventure," said his cousin, watching his face closely.

"Indeed? Nothing tragic, I hope?"

Ilden laughed easily.

"Of course not. What makes you think that anything tragic could happen at Pennybrook?" he said, and Percival bit his lip.

"An adventure generally suggests danger to one's life or one's heart, and everybody agrees that your heart is quite invulnerable. But tell us the adventure."

"It took place in the fir coppice," said Ilden, still watching him, "and concerns a damsel in distress and a mysterious discovery, but I don't think that I will tell it."

"That is too bad," put in Catherine Hay, "after raising our curiosity."

His quiet smile promised that her curiosity should be satisfied later, but he had no intention of telling any of the story at table.

His hostess had pricked up her ears at the mention of a young lady in connection with her nephew's unusual want of punctuality. The fear of his marrying was an abiding one with her, which she had not the tact to conceal.

"If George is wise he will fight shy of damsels in distress," she said, "they always turn out designing cats. Is not that so, Jasper?"

Her husband, thus appealed to, gulped down a glass of port.

"Never knew a woman that wasn't."

Jane Barton took up the cudgels on behalf her sex, and so the conversation drifted.

Ilden took no interest in it until Mrs. Jasper made an announcement.

"This is Percival's last meal with us. He has discovered that he must leave us to-night."

"A rather sudden decision, is it not?" he asked, and his cousin seemed to resent the question.

"I told Uncle Jasper more than a week ago that I should probably be leaving to-night," he said shortly.

His uncle did not remember it, and Ilden became thoughtful.

He would have very much liked to know the reason of his cousin's abrupt departure, but he asked no question.

The thoughtfulness had not left his face when, after dinner, he left the table early and made his way to Catherine Hay's side in the drawing-room.

"I want your advice, Cathie, if you can give me ten minutes all to myself."

"Certainly. Is it about the damsel in distress?"

"No. She must wait. It is about myself."

"Which may be the same thing. Shall we walk in the garden? It is quite warm."

Ilden hesitated.

"No, I don't think I will risk the garden to-night. Come into the library."

"That sounds very serious," she said with a laugh, and Ilden answered half humourously:

"Oh, it *is* serious, as you will find out when we have our talk. Prepare your mind for something very startling."

They were crossing the room as he spoke and at the door met Grant Ilden who had followed his cousin from the table only a moment behind. The poet's handsome, byronic face had darkened into a frown as he stood by for them to pass.

"I am afraid that my dear cousin Grant is not fond of me," said Ilden, lightly, "The looks he gives me are not friendly ones."

Catherine only smiled. Her face was a plain one butit was very pleasing, and when she smiled she looked almost pretty.

Ilden noticed the fact as something new. It had not occurred to him before to think of his cousin's looks. To-night he was half-consciously summing up her physical attractions. They were certainly not so great as those of many girls he had met—of Florence Courthorpe, for example, but for all that she was certainly the nicest girl he had ever known intimately.

"Do you consider me a fanciful or imaginative man at all, Cathie?" he asked when they were in the library, and his cousin shook her head.

"Not in the least, George. If you have a fault it is that you are too sensible and matter-of-fact."

"No, I do not think that I am morbidly imaginative, and if I am not—well, somebody is having a very good try to make Uncle Jasper the seventh Baron Ilden."

Catherine opened her eyes.

"What do you mean, George?"

"That three deliberate attempts have been made on my life during the last month. It sounds as though I were joking, doesn't it? Somehow one can never imagine such a thing as possible outside a novel. But the thing is getting very plain, and, after all, I suppose the idea would never get into the novels if it did not occur now and then in real life. It sounds so ridiculous that I have not breathed a word to a soul of what I think; but I should like to know what you make of it. If you'll sit down, I'll tell you exactly what happened."

"It certainly seems incredible!" cried the girl, her sympathetic face as grave and impressed as he could wish. "Who could possibly wish for your death?"

"That is one of the points which I want to discuss with you when I have told you the facts," said Ilden, who was always methodical. "At the beginning of the month I happened to be at Ilden for a few days, preparatory to my visit to Kirby. One day I was riding out alone there, when, in one of the lanes, my horse was frightened by the report of a gun behind the hedge. I was riding with a loose rein, and was lighting a cigarette at the moment, and I was nearly thrown; but it did not occur to me that I had been fired at. I noticed no bullet, and I put it down to the act of some idiot who was frightening birds in the fields. My horse had bolted, and, when I got him under control, I did not think of going back. I should have thought nothing more about it, but for what happened afterwards. You know that at Kirby one of the keepers was shot in the arm when we were all out potting at the birds."

"Yes, and nobody could decide whose fault it was. You do not mean to say——"

"That it was not the fault of any of the shooting party, and that the shot was meant for me. Marston, the keeper, and I were at the back behind everybody, and the shot came from behind us. And what is more, if it had not found a billet in Marston's forearm it would have had a very good chance of my heart. He had just stretched out

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his arm to hand me some cartridges, and the fact probably saved my life. But I did not realise that it was a deliberate attempt till afterwards, and I have not suggested it to anybody till now. I imagined that some of the fellows might be straggling behind in the next field. It was after the bullet had been extracted and they found it was of a different pattern from any we were using that the thing became mysterious. At Kirby they have decided that it was fired by some hidden poacher who owed Marston a grudge, and I left the matter undecided in my own mind until this evening. As I was coming home through the fir coppice in the dusk, a shot was fired deliberately at me and missed me by about three inches. Luckily the fellow, whoever he may be, seems a poor shot. I should just like three shots at him under the same conditions. I do not think that he would trouble me again. But if he goes on practising at this rate he will be getting a bull's-eye before long."

His light tone did nothing to lessen her consternation. Her plain little face had turned quite white.

"It is terrible," she cried. "And you have never seen who your foe is?"

"No, that is the nuisance. Each time I have been quite unprepared, and to-night is the first time that I have ever realised that the shot was meant for me at the moment, or thought of looking for the gentleman who fired it. And to-night I had no great chance. You see the fellow had an idea of my position and I had none of his, so I could not go searching around without giving him odds."

"And you cannot guess who it is? You cannot have injured anybody?"

"No, I can't remember that I have ever injured anybody."

"Not even unintentionally while you were abroad, some Corsican or Spaniard, or Hindoo? They are always said to be so vindictive."

Ilden laughed.

"You are thinking of the tales you have read. I ought according to them to have robbed a Hindoo temple, or paid an innocent compliment to a jealous Spaniard's wife. But I am afraid that I have not done a single romantic thing during my travels. No, seriously, I feel quite sure that it cannot be revenge for anything I have done. My conscience is quite clear."

"Then why should anyone possibly want to kill you? What motive can anybody have?"

Ilden's eyes met hers suggestively.

"What do you think?"

"I can't think. How could anybody benefit by your death—except——"

She stopped, staring at him with horror-struck eyes. "You do not think——"

Ilden shrugged his shoulders.

"One has to find some motive. Of course I should not mention my suspicion to anybody else. But I know you can be trusted Cathie to keep it to yourself, and I want to talk it over with an unprejudiced person like yourself. And to speak quite openly, I cannot see any possible motive for these attempts except the inheritance."

"You mean that your death would give your uncle Jasper a title, and relieve him from all his money difficulties."

"That is certainly true, but I do not think uncle Jasper has anything to do with it himself. He would not take the trouble. But, unfortunately, Uncle Jasper is far from being the only person who would benefit by my disappearance from the scene. Somebody told me jocularly at Kirby that all the Jews would be glad to see my name in the obituary column."

"The Jews?"

"The money-lenders. They have not much chance of getting back all they have advanced to Uncle Jasper unless he comes into the estate. As a little chap I was very delicate, and all my brothers died in their infancy. So his expectations were worth something. I have defrauded his creditors by growing up strong and healthy."

"And you think that they would try to take your life?" she asked anxiously, and Ilden shrugged his shoulders again.

"Who knows? They are supposed to do anything for money, and they are taking very little risk. And at the rate he is going on our host is likely to kill himself in less than a year, so one can understand their being impatient. Well?"

Catherine had uttered an exclamation.

"I was thinking of something I overheard a few nights ago," she said hesitatingly. "There can be no harm in repeating it when your life is in so much danger. I was passing Mr. Jasper's room and heard his wife evidently in a temper. She does not care who hears her when she is angry, and I could not avoid catching these words as I passed: 'You don't care. But I do, for if you die before him I shall be plain Mrs. Ilden all my life.' I imagined at the time that she was remonstrating with him on the way in which he lives, and the indifference he shows to his health."

"As she probably was, I scarcely think that even Mrs. Jasper would plot against my life at the top of her voice, although she is not noted for her prudence. Still, it shows that she is another person who has calculated the benefits which would accrue from my death. Let us tot them up before we consider which of them is likely to let the wish affect their affection. We have Uncle Jasper, his wife, and creditors, the last an indefinite army. Then, of course, Uncle Rupert could look forward very confidently to succeeding his brother before long if I were out of the way, and both Percival and Grant would benefit by the change."

"Not Grant," she objected, quickly.

"He would have an increased allowance and be 'the Honourable.' I do not know whether he has any desire for the distinction, but Jane tells me that he is always grumbling about his position, and the fact that he can never afford to marry."

"You have dropped something?" inquired Lord Ilden. "Yes, I have lost two five-pound notes," she answered, in a tone of suppressed anxiety.

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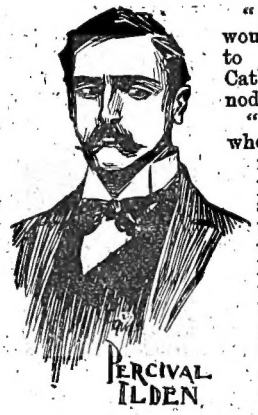

"But I am quite sure that he would not think of injuring anybody to improve his position," said Catherine warmly, and her cousin nodded.

"I do not suppose that he would, when he would benefit his brother more than himself. It is not a pleasant thing to imagine that any of one's relatives are contemplating murder, but one has to put sentiment on one side and look facts in the face. And the worst of it is that, to tell the brutal truth, one could believe it of any of them. Uncle Jasper would not exert himself to win a crown, but he has allowed himself to sink into such a state that anybody could influence him. His wife has done very little to inspire me with a high opinion of her scrupulousness. Uncle Rupert might do anything for all that I know. I do not understand him, and I can never make out whether he does not care a toss for anything, or feels very deeply and keeps all his emotions to himself. At any rate, I have never known him show a single human one. Then Percival—well, I won't talk about Percival because he has done so much to prejudice me against him. You see that without the money-lenders there are plenty of people to suspect, and while I am investigating I stand a very good chance of being shot, probably by somebody that I have never thought of."

"You ought to leave England," said Catherine, impressed. "It is impossible for you to guard yourself here, when you are so completely in the dark as to your enemy."

Ilden laughed with a touch of bitterness.

"I might be inclined to do so if I had the slightest idea when they would allow me to come back. I don't want to spend my life abroad."

"Of course not. You will want to marry and settle down."

"I have not been conscious of any particular desire to marry until to-night," said Ilden, and Catherine's eyes brightened. There had been some vague talk about a "damsel in distress," forgotten till now in the tragic interest of what her cousin had told her.

"And to-night you met somebody whom you can imagine yourself wishing to marry?" she asked.

Ilden smiled.

"No, I have never met the lady for whom I can imagine myself caring more than I care for you, Cousin Cathie."

"Then why did you think of marrying?"

"Because it would be the best check I could give to the intrigue against me. It must be a matter of the inheritance, and the man, whoever it is, who is trying to kill me, must be excited by the thought that it is only a single life—or at the most, my life and that of two elderly gentlemen—which stands between him and his ambition. If I provide myself with an heir the whole case is altered. The most resolute of villains—and this one acts like a timid coward—would not care to undertake the murder of myself and a family. With every son I have I make my own life of less importance to them."

"I see," she said thoughtfully. "You would checkmate them without even finding out who it is that threatens your life. But—whom can you marry?"

Ilden rose and extended his hands.

"Yourself, of course, dear cousin, if you will do me the honour of accepting me."

Catherine laughed, reddening slightly.

"Do not joke, George. The position is far too serious."

"And I am as serious as the position. I know that it is rather impertinent of me to ask anybody to be my wife, when they have such a good chance of being widowed before the wedding day or, under certain circumstances, of finding even their own life in danger, but I know you would do a good deal to help me."

"I would do anything—except marry you."

"And why not *that*?" he said, his tone made more earnest by the decisiveness of hers. "We have always been very fond of one another, Cathie."

"Fond of one another? Yes. But you know that you are not in love with me, George—any more than I am with you."

"And you are not fond enough of me to take the risk?"

"The risk is the only thing that could make me think of marrying you. To help you out of your precarious position I believe I would have been your wife, George, if it was only that we weren't exactly in love with each other. But it is not the only thing. So you must think of somebody else."

Ilden was both surprised and piqued, although he was very properly ashamed to have to admit the fact to himself.

Although it had been an understood thing that his cousin and he were only "good friends," he had expected her to be quite ready to change the relationship to something more intimate, and he paid now for his egotism in chagrin.

"No, thanks," he said rather stiffly. "there is no other woman that I should think of asking to be my wife."

Catherine looked concerned.

"You are not in love with me, are you, George?" she asked anxiously.

"More so than with anybody else."

"Oh! that is nothing. I declare that you made me quite frightened. And if you can't checkmate your enemy by marrying, let us think what else you ought to do."

"I am afraid that you cannot help me in any other way. If I had known I should not have bothered you with the business. It will only make you anxious."

To his surprise, she put her arms round his neck and kissed him.

"Don't be angry, George dear. I am really very sorry, but I can't help it. And you must not say that you are sorry you treated me like a friend. Because we are friends, and always shall be, and I for one shan't have a moment's peace until we find out who your enemy is. If you can think of any way in which I can help you to find out, you will let me know, won't you."

He promised, feeling ashamed of his momentary ill-temper, and, leaving her, strolled back to the drawing-room.

Mrs. Jasper met him with the announcement that Percival had been looking for him to bid him "good-bye," and had been obliged to start without doing so to catch his train.

"Who drove him?" asked Ilden, nervously kicking his heel, and before he went to bed that night he walked round to the stables for a chat with the groom who had seen Percival Ilden off.

He felt more at ease in his mind when he was convinced that his cousin had really been seen to depart in the express.

"I think I shall be safe enough here for the present," he said to himself.

CHAPTER III.

The Poison in the Flask.

It was not till he woke in the morning that Ilden remembered again the envelope addressed to himself which he had picked up in the fir coppice, and, as soon as he had dressed, he went in search of the butler.

"Who opens the post-bag in the morning, Wardle?" he asked, and, as he expected, found that the old man reserved the duty for himself.

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"And does nobody see the letters before you do?" asked Ilden.

"Not as a rule, my lord."

"And when is the rule broken?" asked the young man.

"Well, while Mr. Percival has been here, he has been impatient to get his letters, and has generally looked through the bag for them before I sorted them out, my lord."

Ilden pulled out his envelope.

"I suppose you cannot remember what day it was that I received this?"

The butler examined it thoughtfully.

"No, my lord. I do not remember seeing it at all."

It was all that Ilden wanted to know from him, and he put on his cap for a stroll in the fir coppice before breakfast. It was scarcely to be expected that the inclosure had been thrown away in the same place as the envelope; but George was inclined, as usual, to rely on his luck, and he was curious to examine the scene of his adventure in the daylight.

"Now, if this were only in a tale," he said to himself, as he approached the spot where the shot had been fired, "the fellow would have left some trace behind him by which I could identify him."

But, as usual, actual fact showed itself less kind to detective enterprise than in the story books, and his search produced no more trace of his unknown assailant than of the stolen letter.

The bullet alone remained as evidence of the evening's adventure imbedded in the bark of the tree where it had buried itself. He found it after a considerable amount of searching, and cut it out with his pocket knife to compare at some time or other with another bullet preserved by his friends at Kirby.

He returned to breakfast, wondering whether the stolen letter could have any connection with the plot against his life. If so, it was probable that he had an unknown friend at Lallerton, wherever that might be, who had wished to warn him, and it was significant that, so far as appearances went, it was Percival Ilden who had found it worth while to intercept the warning. It might be as well to spend a few days at Lallerton and give his unknown lady correspondent a chance of giving him her warning by word of mouth.

He was concocting an excuse for leaving Pennybrook a little earlier than he had intended when he reached the Hall, to find his man, Jardine, looking out for him anxiously.

"Something rather strange has happened, my lord, which I thought I ought to let you know at once," he said, and produced from his pocket a glass-cloth burnt and stained as if by some corrosive acid.

"What is that?" said Ilden.

"That is what I can't make out, my lord. But it seems to me very queer, and I thought that you would like to see it. Last night you told me to wash out your pocket-flask and I did it the first thing this morning. There was certainly nothing in it then, and I am quite sure that I washed it out thoroughly. When I had polished it up, I left it standing upside down for any water I might have left in to drain out, and it remained there for some time while I took up your coffee. I did not go back for it until you had left the house, my lord, and then I found it standing the right way up.

"I wondered who had touched it, and shook it out, over this cloth, as it happened, to see whether any drain of water had been left in it, and out came this coloured stuff, my lord. I thought it must be a stupid joke on the part of some of the servants, as one of the maids was reading in the room all the time I was away—although I don't know who would dare to take such a liberty, when they can see whose flask it is—but when I saw that it had eaten a hole into the cloth, I did not know what to think, my lord. If I had not happened to shake it out again before filling it up, you might have been poisoned."

"That is very probable," said Ilden, examining the cloth, "and perhaps I owe my life to your carefulness, Jardine. Where did this happen? In the butler's pantry?"

"In the kitchen, my lord. I stood the flask near the window."

"Was the window open?"

"Yes, my lord. My own idea was that it was done by somebody outside, but the kitchen wasn't left empty at all, I find, while I was away."

"And you are quite sure that the flask was quite clear when you left it?"

"Quite sure, my lord."

Ilden looked thoughtful.

"Either I owe my dear Cousin Percival an apology for my thoughts or he has left an ally behind him at Pennybrook," he said to himself.

"You have not talked about this, I suppose, Jardine?" he asked aloud, and was prepared to find that his valet had shown his usual discretion. He had questioned the servants to ascertain, so far as their assertions went, that not one had touched the flask, but none of them knew what had occurred to make him ask the question.

His master nodded approvingly.

"And have you washed out the flask again?"

"Yes, my lord, I am sorry to say that I cleaned it completely again before I noticed that the cloth was burnt or imagined it anything more than a stupid practical joke."

"That is a pity," said Ilden. "A chemist might have told us what it contained, but perhaps he will be able to judge from the cloth. I will keep that to submit to an analyst. And meanwhile you can pack up my things to catch the ten o'clock train."

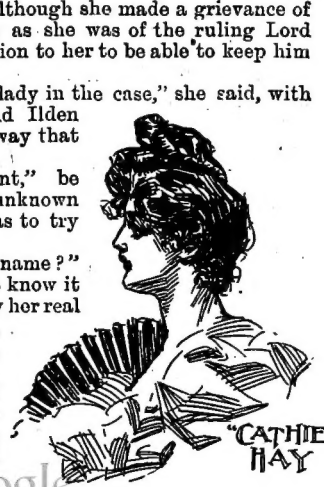
"For the Castle, my lord?"

"Yes," said Ilden, although he had not the least intention of returning to Ilden Castle himself for the present.

He was far from being a nervous man, but, except in moments of impulse, he was not foolhardy, and it seemed to him that by remaining at Pennybrook, while he was so completely at sea as to the source of danger which threatened him, he would be making the odds too heavy against himself. If he knew or even suspected who his opponent was, out of the many who would gain by his death, he would have dared him by remaining where he was and trusting to his wit to protect him from any attacks; but to be dogged by an unknown foe while he was making his investigations was too disturbing. He wanted to feel at least a momentary security while he thought over the position and arranged a plan of action.

Against a revolver one may take precautions, but poison is an insidious thing, the danger of which gets on a man's nerves, and he felt no scruple in announcing his immediate departure to Mrs. Jasper, although she made a grievance of it, as he expected. Jealous as she was of the ruling Lord Ilden, it was some satisfaction to her to be able to keep him in her sight.

"I suppose there is a lady in the case," she said, with animosity in her tone, and Ilden smiled in the sphinx-like way that irritated her.



"To some slight extent," he answered, thinking of the unknown correspondent whom he was to try and find at Lallerton.

"And may we know her name?"

"Unfortunately I do not know it myself," he said, amused by her real anxiety; but the smile left his face when she answered:

"Then I think that I can give you the information you want. It is Florence Courthorpe. I hear more than you think,

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you see," she went on cheerfully, as she noticed the change in his expression; "but I warn you that you will find her a designing minx. She is being sent away from the Rectory because she made a dead set at young Haydon. The impertinence of it—a girl without a penny."

Her nephew was inclined to champion the girl, but thought better of it. The fact that Mrs. Ilden had evidently heard of his meeting with her might be significant.

"I suppose that Percival saw us?" he hazarded, with assumed indifference; but the ex-actress was glad of her chance to be mysterious. It was her turn now.

"Ah! that is my secret," she said, and turned away to spread the news that Ilden was following his cousin's example and leaving them at a moment's notice.

Her husband grumbled good-naturedly, but perfunctorily. The Honourable Rupert, however, surprised his nephew by emerging from his usual taciturn reserve to emphasise his regret. He was a handsome, moody-looking man, whose face, worn by ill-health, expressed an unchanging melancholy. His expression, indeed, never seemed to show any change; but, as if to atone for the fact, his hands were always moving with a restless nervousness which suggested an actual mental disturbance under his appearance of emotionless calm.

His fingers twitched more noticeably than usual, as he took his nephew apart to express his regret at his departure.

"It has been a great pleasure to me to see you again, my boy," he said, in his timid and hesitating manner. "And to see you growing every year more like your dead mother. I don't know whether your father ever told you that we were rivals for her hand as we were rivals for so many other things in our youth."

"No, sir," said Ilden, feeling more and more surprised by this unexpected show of feeling.

"She was the only woman I ever really loved," his uncle went on, his fingers twitching, "and I see her again in you. Perhaps that is why I am fonder of you than of my own sons. But Percival does nothing but disgrace me, and Grant—well, Grant never seems like an Ilden to me with his long hair and his scribbling."

"Cousin Grant's verses are very much admired, and have gained him a considerable reputation," said Ilden, rather perfunctorily, but the poet's father only shrugged his shoulders.

"I was hoping that you would come and stay with us at Mordenhall when you finished your visit here," he said. "I hope this business of yours which is taking you away will not interfere with that."

A few minutes earlier Ilden had been very determined to avoid Mordenhall as studiously as he was going to avoid the home of his other uncle, but Rupert Ilden's unusual and unexpected confidence had touched him, and when he left him it was with a provisional promise to visit him at his home before the end of the year. It was not till they went in to breakfast, and his uncle resumed his usual air of morose taciturnity in the presence of the others, that a suspicion returned to his mind, and he asked himself whether the confidence had not been deliberately intended to win the promise.

It was a relief to talk to Catherine, although he was still feeling not a little piqued at her refusal to marry him. She had come down late to breakfast and hurried through her meal to be able to accompany him to the station.

"I shall not breathe freely until you are out of the place," she said earnestly. "I have been awake all night thinking of your danger. I am sure that you are doing right to leave here at once. You will go abroad, will you not?"

"I do not think it is necessary, and besides I can't simply remain out of the way without doing something to discover who my enemy is. Just at present I shall lie low in some little country place where I know nobody. If anyone of my acquaintances follows, it will give me *prima facie* evidence against him. If a stranger appears I shall at least be on my guard against him. Here at the Hall there is no chance of telling foes from friends."

"But you will let *me* know where you are, George," she urged. "I shall be in constant suspense about you, and if I don't hear, shall imagine the worst."

"Then I will drop you a line when I settle anywhere. The first thing at present is to cover my tracks."

He broke into a little laugh as he spoke.

"How ridiculous it all sounds somehow."

"Ridiculous? It is terrible."

"I wish I could think it so. I might enjoy the excitement of this hide-and-seek business then. But somehow I can't help believing that somebody is having a try at my life, and yet directly I think of acting on the suspicion, I feel as though I were pretending to play melodrama."

"But you cannot think too seriously of your danger or take too great precautions after what has passed," she cried, rendered more anxious than ever by his indifference, "although I do not think that it can be one of your relatives who is threatening you. I have been thinking it over all night, and I think it must be a money-lender as you suggest."

"And if you met the money-lenders, you would be quite sure that it was not one of them," said Ilden smiling. "The truth of the matter is that it is impossible to believe nowadays that anybody you know can possibly contemplate murder. It seems altogether out of date."

They were talking in the breakfast-room where Catherine was finishing her meal alone, and Ilden rose abruptly to walk to the folding French windows and throw them open.

Despite his genuine inability to realise the absolute seriousness of his position, his attention had been keenly on the alert since the discovery of the poison, and it seemed to him that he had heard stealthy footsteps on the gravel path outside.

He was half ashamed of his precipitancy when he found that it was only Grant.

The poet's dark, dreamy face had reddened slightly.

"I was just coming to warn you that you will be losing your train if you do not start now," he said. "I will drive down to the station with you and see you off if I may."

Ilden hesitated.

"Catherine has kindly offered to see me off."

"Well, there is plenty of room in the wagonette unless you want to talk secrets," said Grant, and Catherine answered before her cousin could do so.

"That is just what we are going to do. So you must bid George good-bye while I run and put on my hat. I had no idea it was so late."

Grant's face darkened, and as the girl left them alone together he made scarcely a pretence of friendliness.

Catherine was back in a few moments, and found the two standing in the hall uncomfortably silent.

"My relatives seem very fond of me now that I am going," said Ilden, as he took his seat beside her in the wagonette. "Uncle Rupert has been pressing me most warmly to visit Mordenhall, and Grant seems quite cross at not being permitted to see me off."

There was a touch of irony in his tone, and Catherine reddened.

"You will learn to like Grant when you know him

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better," she said. "He is quite different from his brother —and sister."

"I hope so," said Ilden. "It is not nice to feel so indifferent to one's own people."

In his own mind he was wondering whether his cousin had really been about to enter the breakfast-room when he threw open the window. His appearance had been rather that of an eavesdropper taken unawares. And why had he wanted to see him off? It was certainly well, he told himself, for him to get away from Pennybrook, when he found himself looking at everybody with suspicious eyes.

As they neared the station Catherine touched his arm.

"I wonder who this man is," she whispered. "I have never seen him before, and I believe I know everybody in Pennybrook by sight now. I have determined to be on the look-out for strangers."

They were overtaking a tall, well-dressed man of about thirty, who was sauntering along the path with hands clasped behind him and eyes downcast, in the attitude of a man deep in thought.

He looked up sharply as the wagonette passed, and Catherine drew involuntarily nearer to her companion as if to shield him.

"I am sure that he recognised you," she said when they were safely past, and she drew a deep sigh of relief. "I really thought that he was going to draw out a revolver and shoot you."

Ilden laughed.

"That is the worst of telling you girls anything. You imagine so much. Of course the fellow stared when he found us both looking at him so closely. I have never seen him before."

"I am sure that he has seen you before, and I did not like the look in his eyes. Should you know him if you saw him again?"

"Certainly. His face was rather striking with its hooked features and wild-looking eyes."

"He did not look like a money-lender," said Cathie, thoughtfully.

"Nor a paid assassin," laughed Ilden. "However, you are right in paying attention to strangers. You might try and find out who he is when I am gone. Although, if I really have anything to fear from him, he is not likely to remain here. It must have been quite apparent to him that I am leaving."

"And he will follow to the station to try and find out where you are going. Do you know, George, I feel horribly nervous about him. You must not give him any chance of shooting you at the station or in the train."

Ilden laughed at her tragic tone.

"I believe he has turned back," he said.

A turn in the road had taken them out of sight of the stranger almost as soon as they passed him, and they had both been looking back expecting him to appear in sight again round the curve. It seemed as though they would look in vain.

"Unless he has taken the short cut to the station across the fields," said Catherine, with undiminished nervousness. "If he does that you will know that it is on your account, George, because he certainly was not hurrying to catch the train when we caught sight of him."

"That is true. You ought to be a detective, Cathie. With you to assist me, we could baffle our enemies. Are you sure that you won't change your mind and marry me?"

"Quite sure, thank you. The man is not in sight yet. He must certainly have turned back, or taken the short cut to the station."

Her desire to change the subject was more marked than he could have wished, and he lapsed into silence until the buildings came in sight.

Catherine uttered an exclamation.

"I was right—he is at the station."

The tall figure which they had seen on the road was just disappearing into the booking-office.

"He must have run all the way through the fields," the girl went on excitedly. "I am sure that we have found your enemy."

"If I thought that," said Ilden, doubtfully, "I should make a point of following the fellow and finding out who he is. I might get at the object of the plot then."

"There will be no need. He is sure to follow you."

"Then I will save him trouble by travelling in the same compartment."

Catherine looked frightened.

"George, you must take care of yourself. It is serious."

"And I am treating it seriously. The man cannot be so dangerous if I keep him in view."

"He may carry a revolver, and try to shoot you in the train."

Ilden tapped his pocket.

"I carry a revolver too, and if he should turn out to be the gentleman with whose shooting I am acquainted, I flatter myself that I am the better shot."

They had reached the station now, and entered the booking-office to find that the stranger had already left it.

"We shall no doubt find him on the platform," said Ilden, leading the way, but it seemed as if the unknown had been anxious to avoid observation. The platform was empty except for the railway officials. The train was standing ready to start. It was waiting indeed only for his lordship and his luggage to be taken aboard and Ilden turned to bid his cousin a hurried "good-bye."

"If I find our friend in the train," he said, "I shall give myself the pleasure of travelling with him, and he turned to walk up the platform.

There were tears in Catherine's eyes. Now that the moment of parting had come she was overcome by the thought of the danger which threatened him. Her eyes followed him as if she were seeing him for the last time, and the picture of his tall handsome figure was blurred and indistinct to her as he made his way by the side of the waiting train glancing with apparent indifference into each compartment as he passed.

Yes, the stranger who was acting so suspiciously had certainly taken his place in a third-class compartment of the train, and Ilden was stretching out his hand to open the door when the movement arrested itself.

For seated opposite to the suspect, and engaged apparently in animated conversation with him, was Florence Courthorpe, 'the lady of the bank-notes,' as he had called her to himself.

(A further long instalment of "A Foe in the Family" will appear in next Tuesday's issue.)

MISS TELLIT: "Do you know I heard to-day that Flossie Fusseigh's engagement ring is paste." Miss Gabbeigh: "Oh, how perfectly lovely and appropriate. You know her *fiancé* is a bill poster."

CHAPPIE: "I say, Miss Highsail, don't you think my parents made a horrible mistake in calling me Geawge?" Miss Highsail: "Dear me, yes. I think Lucy would have been much more appropriate."

MISS OLIVE: "The gentleman you just recognised is an artist, isn't he?" Miss Claire: "Yes. You divined his profession from his artistic carriage, I presume." "No, I didn't see anything of his carriage. I smelt the turpentine on his clothes."

MRS. NEBB: "I am going to an observation party this afternoon, dear." Husband: "An observation party? What sort of a party is that?" Mrs. Nebb: "Mrs. Quizzer's next door neighbour is moving, and Mrs. Quizzer has invited a few friends to watch through the windows and see what they have."

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THE OLD, OLD GAME OF HEARTS.

Telling of an Engagement, a Parting, and a Reunion.

If ever a young woman was guiltily distressed and distractedly happy at the same time, that young woman was Marion Towne, when, after being engaged for four contented months to one man, she met another and fell the victim of an immediate infatuation.

She had believed herself to be honestly and unchangeably in love with Ferguson, the first man. The suddenness, the unexpectedness, of this new experience startled, shamed, and overwhelmed her. The fact that her affections could be so easily transferred was an unwelcome revelation. Marion had always insisted that a woman could love but once.

True, she and Ferguson had at the start made a compact—after the manner of would-be sensible lovers—the which provided for such a contingency as this.

"Genuine love is never arbitrary, never selfish," he had said. "Mine for you is so strong, so high, that should you chance, before our engagement terminates, to find another who more nearly fills your heart, I will give you up to him readily, ignoring my own suffering. Your happiness is my first consideration."

Marion had agreed with him that this was the highest love. In fact, she had gone so far as to promise that she would confide in him unhesitatingly should such a change in her heart occur. He had made her a similar promise.

Perhaps the reason for this wonderful unselfishness was the fact that neither one really believed such a change possible. Both felt secure in the certainty of their affinity for each other.

Consequently it was with a palpitating sense of guilt and distress that Marion awoke to the knowledge of the new attraction.

Dick Hollingsworth, the second man, was that type of masculinity which invariably captivates even the women who theoretically despise it.

Marion knew at once that Hollingsworth did not possess Ferguson's fine characteristics—that there was something unstable and unreliable about him. The very fact that he said things to her in the face of her engagement to another was proof of this.

Yet her clear reason was no safeguard against the magic of his fascinating personality.

Marion remembered her promise to Ferguson, but instead of a desire to confide in him she felt only shame and wretchedness at the thought.

It was while she wavered on the brink of a confession one day that he came to her rescue.

"You need not tell me," he interrupted her gently. "I have seen everything—I understand."

How wonderfully magnanimous he was! How tender, how brave, how noble through it all!

Marion, reflecting on it afterwards, could not but marvel. No other man would have done it.

So she was free! Free to let Hollingsworth say things in that daring way of his which had taken her heart by storm. She could meet those magnetic eyes without feeling guilt because of her heart's rushing response.

That very evening she accepted his invitation to the theatre.

Her happiness was not without its mixture of remorse. Her thoughts would revert to Ferguson. Poor boy! How he must suffer! And she—was she heartless, after all?

But no. It would have been worse still to continue the engagement when her love belonged to the other man.

Her meditations were interrupted by an almost audible murmur in her immediate vicinity. The orchestra was playing the overture and people had not yet ceased arriving.

"What a lovely girl!" "Isn't she superb?" "Exquisite."

Marion caught these whispered remarks and indulged her curiosity as much as good breeding would permit. By turning her head very slightly over her left shoulder she had an excellent view of the really beautiful young woman who was just taking a seat in the row behind. Her escort, settling himself beside her, glanced fully into Marion's face.

After the first startled look of unbelief, the girl withdrew her eyes, turned her face towards the stage and stared unseeingly at the rising curtain.

She scarcely knew when or how the first act began. Everything revolved dizzily. Even her thoughts turned round and round and would not steady themselves.

Howard Ferguson was the escort of that beautiful woman! This much flared before her, vividly, indisputable.

Then the rest of the riddle gradually became plain.

No wonder he had been so ready to give her her freedom. No wonder he had been kind, magnanimous, outwardly resigned!

The taste of that freedom was growing strangely bitter. Even the magnetism of Hollingsworth's wonderful eyes failed to compensate. Somehow he seemed trifling and disappointing to-night. More than once she caught him using his orbs for the benefit of fair women who sat within range of their powers. Disgusting! How could she have thought him so fascinating? He could really say little that amounted to anything. His depth was soon sounded. He could grow tiresome.

And Howard? He looked wonderfully handsome this evening. He and that woman made an unusually striking pair. Yes, there was no use denying it. How happy they both seemed!

Marion bit her lip and reflected upon the folly of human beings since time immemorial.

She had occasion to reflect still further when, a week later, Dick Hollingsworth's attentions began to wane. Another pretty face had attracted him.

Occasionally she met Ferguson alone and chatted with him in an effort to be cordial and friendly. They had agreed to remain friends, of course, in spite of changed conditions.

His engagement to the beautiful woman was beginning to be surmised by interested ones. Marion had no doubt of it. She congratulated Ferguson with the privilege of an old acquaintance.

"We are not engaged," he answered quietly; "nor have we any intention of becoming so."

"I—I thought," stammered Marion—"of course she is so very beautiful it would be only natural to imagine that——"

She paused, confused and trying to conceal her gladness at his reply.

"Some one else is beautiful, too," said Ferguson softly. After a moment's hesitation Marion ventured to meet his eyes. They were warm and sweet with the old love.

"Didn't you understand, dear?" he asked. It was easy for him to explain after that.

In short, they made it all up and became re-engaged.

Marion declares now that she loves him better for the experience.

"Because," she sagely remarks, "I know the difference between the genuine and the false. The counterfeit can never appeal to me again."

Angela Morgan.

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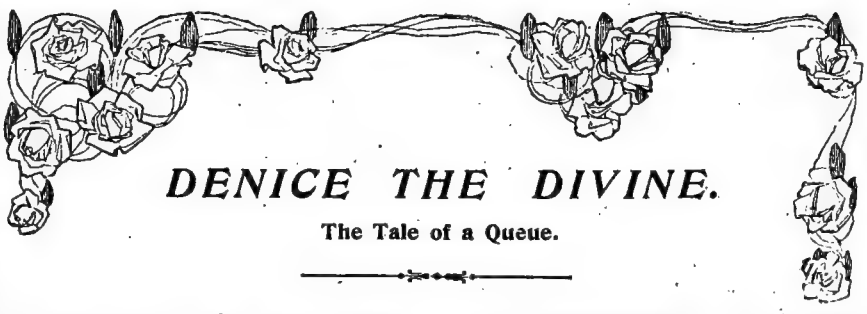

DENICE THE DIVINE.

The Tale of a Queue.

"I don't know what we shall do if she doesn't turn up!"

"Oh, it'll be all right; there's plenty of time for a rehearsal, even if she shouldn't come till the afternoon."

"Look here, Marston — this confounded 'fit-up'—which I've been running at a loss these six months for your special benefit as 'leading-man'—is just on the point of ruining me. Denice Hope is my last chance. If she fails me, I'm done!"

"Known her long?"

"From a child; and it's because she remembers that I taught her all she knows in the way of stage-craft, that she is throwing up a first-class touring 'lead' to help me through."

"She must be a paragon, then."

"A better hearted girl never breathed."

"And rattlingly clever, too, if her 'notices' are worth anything."

"Clever!—she's a genius, man!—her Lady Teazle is a dream!—her Lady Betty Noel in 'Clancarty' a triumph!"

"Yes, but she isn't going to play 'high comedy' in our show."

"Of course not!—but being what she is, she can play anything she is cast for; and is going to play 'lead' in our melodrama till things improve with us."

"What does the Meade say about it?"

"Oh! Cora Meade quite understands that matters couldn't go on like they've been going lately; that, in fact, it was absolutely impossible that I should continue to suffer by her wretched incompetence."

"What's she going to do?"

"She's done it!—left two hours ago for London; so that you see, should Denice not arrive in time, I haven't even the second-rate article to fall back upon."

The two men—Peyton Edwards, proprietor and manager of the 'fit-up,' and Sidney Marston, his 'leading man'—were standing on the small improvised stage of the little hall, which generally did duty for a theatre in Newton-Tanfield.

The best of 'fit ups' is only a makeshift; but the enterprise engineered by manager Edwards, was, if anything, more of a makeshift than ordinary. The scenery—what there was of it—was deplorably old, and altogether unsuitable to the production, a touring melodrama of the ultra sensational sort. The properties were in the same condition as the scenery; the "company"—with the exception of Sidney Marston—of the more than usually "scratch" order; so that the provincial public were to be pardoned for not assembling in their thousands to enjoy and to applaud.

"Don't you think it a bit of a shame," said Marston presently, "to bring this clever young creature into *this?* (sweeping his right arm round the dingy place); and all just to bolster up a show which will never run as long as the world lasts."

"I confess you're right, Sid; but the dear girl was so ready to come, and do me this good turn, that, in spite of my conviction, I'm afraid I've deceived myself into looking at things from her point of view."

"And what is that, if I may ask?"

Both men started—they had been standing with their backs to the auditorium—and, turning round, encountered the merriest pair of eyes, set in the sweetest face, that Sidney Marston, for one, had ever seen.

"Is this the way you receive me, Daddy Edwards, after my journey half across England to see you? Why you are dumb!—and I—I am *so* tired——"

"My dear Denice!—forgive me!—you've improved so out of all knowledge that, as you say, I am literally struck dumb."

"Thanks, most reverend Daddy! your professional offspring dutifully appreciates the compliment."

Then the dainty little lady cast a furtively inquisitive glance at Marston. The manager intercepted it, and forthwith introduced the 'leading man' to the new-comer.

"Marston—this is Denice Hope; our only hope now, if she will not mind my making a bad joke. This, Denice, is Sidney Marston, my 'leading man,' and my friend."

"Mr. Marston—to be Daddy's friend—I have called him 'Daddy' ever since I could speak almost—is the very best recommendation to my good opinion. It may not be worth much, but such as it is, it is entirely at your service."

This was said with a mock curtesy, old-fashioned—sweeping.

As for Sidney Marston, it altogether subjugated him, and he was, from that moment Denice Hope's most devoted slave.

Poor Edwards' spirits, lately so low, were now at exhilaration point.

"Where are you stopping, child?" he said to Denice.

"At the Royal Hotel."

It was the crack inn in Newton-Tanfield; very exclusive, and very expensive.

"Ah! yes!—of course you wouldn't stop anywhere else. Well, you must go and get some lunch at once, and be back here for a rehearsal by three o'clock. I sent you the 'script' of the play, as well as your 'part,' so you'll have a fair idea of *A Woman of the World* by this time."

"My dear Daddy!—I've got it all at my finger's ends."

"Good!—then we'll see you to the Royal, and leave you to a couple of hours rest and refreshment."

In the street, opposite the side door, a station fly was waiting.

Signing to the driver, Denice was in the act of accepting Sidney's assistance into the carriage, when, turning her head, she saw a well-dressed young fellow; dark featured, and saturnine of expression, watching her a few paces off."

"Good gracious!" she whispered to Marston, "that man has followed me from Newcastle!—he must have come by the same train!"

"Who is he?" asked Sidney and Edwards, in the same breath.

"I don't know! He calls himself Lionel Trevelyan, but I have an idea that it is not his proper name."

The words were scarcely out of her mouth, when the man came up to the carriage door and addressed the actress.

"Miss Hope," he said, in a low voice, and raising his hat, "may I ask if you have a reply for me?"

"If you mean to your letter, sir—certainly not. What do you mean by following me about in this manner! This gentleman (indicating Edwards) is my manager, and any communication you may have to make, let it be to him. Mr. Marston, tell the driver, the Royal, please."

But the intruder would not be so easily baulked of his intention to interview Denice Hope.

"I *must* have your answer, here, and now!" he excitedly exclaimed, pressing up to the vehicle, and putting both hands upon it.

"Don't you see, sir," said Sidney Marston, angrily, "that the lady declines to listen to you?"

"I do not know you, sir—and my business is with Miss Hope—not with you."

"Mr. Trevelyan—I have nothing to say to you, now, or at any future time."

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"Is that so?"

"You hear what the lady says," said Marston. "You are annoying her, and if you persist, I shall call a policeman."

It so happened that one of the few constables in the town strolled up at this point.

A word or two of explanation from Edwards, and Lionel Trevelyan was politely but firmly requested by the law's representative to fall back and allow the carriage to proceed.

On the way to the hotel, Denice explained that for months this man, who, both by word of mouth, when opportunity offered, and by a ceaseless succession of letters, made fierce love to her; asking her, indeed, to marry him at almost a moment's notice.

It had become a veritable persecution, and she had hoped that her present destination had been kept so secret that he would not be able to follow her.

Most young actresses have their outside admirers, but this was getting serious, inasmuch as it was getting on her nerves.

The rehearsal at three o'clock passed off without any further trouble in this direction, Sidney Marston taking upon himself, at the manager's request, to safely see Denice back to her hotel.

Neither of them saw a dark-browed, evil-expressioned man shadowing them from a safe distance.

Although Sidney Marston was undeniably smitten with the charms of the fair Denice, called in every big town on the northern circuit, "Denice, the Divine," the conversation of the actor and the actress was of the most commonplace and conventional character.

The shadower, however, evidently thought otherwise, for he spasmodically clenched his hands, and muttered unintelligibly.

Sidney parted from his companion at the hotel entrance, and turned immediately to retrace his steps.

This, in a dozen yards or so, brought him face to face with Trevelyan.

Whether it was his new-born interest in Denice that prompted him; or whether it was just an idea with him, that the stranger was taking an unwarrantable liberty in forcing his unwelcome attentions upon the actress, Marston peremptorily stayed him, and gave him a bit of his mind.

"Look here, Mr. Trevelyan—if that is your name—I don't want to threaten you; but if *I* catch you molesting or annoying Miss Hope in any way, I promise you it will not be good for you. Good morning."

Big and stalwart, Sidney Marston looked down upon the slighter figure of the other, and contemptuously sought to impress his meaning, by an emphatic marking time with his forefinger on the breast of Trevelyan's coat.

Beyond, a still more scorching gleam in the latter's eyes, he made no sign—did not speak a word.

His object gained, Marston passed on up the street; Trevelyan, his head turned, looking after him, the same evil expression in his eyes.

The first night of Denice Hope's appearance, though the audience was small, the enthusiasm was great. The next evening the house could have been filled three times over.

Edwards was jubilant, and saw that the end of the week would, if the good business continued, put him well upon his financial feet.

At curtain-fall on the third night Marston remained on the stage a minute or two, talking to Denice.

"There is a lovely place, about three miles out of the town, I should like to show you, if I may, to-morrow. What do you say; if it's fine, will you walk as far with me?"

She would; her ready acquiescence sending a thrill through him, as he thought and wondered whether it meant mere liking, or something of a warmer nature.

Actors, by very reason of their calling, are, as a class, given to self-consciousness; but Sidney Marston was a peculiar exception to this rule. In the three days during which he had known Denice, he could not disguise from himself that he loved her, but that she had a similar feeling for himself he did not dare to imagine. Put the matter to the test, he felt he soon must, even at the risk of an adverse result.

To his friend Edwards he said not a word; he feared discouragement in that quarter, and determined to act entirely upon his own initiative, and keep his own counsel.

As luck would have it, he was the last to leave the building that night. He was in no particular hurry, and dressed himself in leisurely fashion.

It was a very dark night, and as he stood for a moment in the doorway, the glow of his cigar lighted up his features in a weird way, suggestive of the fiend in *Faust*.

Half past eleven chimed from the clock in the market-place.

There was not a soul to be seen in the street; everything was silent as the grave.

Suddenly a report rang out from a doorway on the other side of the street, and Sidney Marston fell on his face on to the pavement, with a revolver bullet in his right breast.

* * * * *

Two and a half years later, a big crowd was assembled outside a certain fashionable theatre in the West End of London.

Away from the pit doors the "queue" extended, three deep, down a side street, till the head of it could scarcely see the tail.

Taken altogether, it was an orderly "queue," only one individual providing a discordant note.

This was a man who, a late comer, contrived to elude the vigilance of the police who kept the line, and to insinuate himself gradually towards the head of the string of waiting people.

Some resented the unfair action, others, women mostly, mildly protested, but ultimately gave way.

By this means, the man had got to within a dozen rows of the door, when unable to advance any further forward, he remained.

He was a dark-featured man, of middle height, spare, and restless of manner.

The stage-door of this particular house was situated at the point where the man stood; the crowd being broken to allow of the passage of the players.

The play was *Romeo and Juliet*, with Denice Hope, and Sidney Marston in the title *rôles*.

For a month after the attempt on his life, Sidney Marston lay very near to death; then, the bullet extracted, he took a turn for the better, and rapidly recovered.

Without his 'leading man,' Edwards was again helpless, and in despair disbanded his company, and threw up the sponge.

Denice Hope, however, remained in Newton-Tanfield until the crisis was past with Sidney. The result may be imagined.

One day, with the doctor, appeared a vision, who, vision-like, would not speak, but smiled at the patient, so that, when she had vanished, he declared himself to be nearly well.

It certainly helped the consummation on wonderfully, as in another six weeks he was ready for work again.

In the *Era* he saw that "juvenile lead" was required in the touring company in which he knew that Denice Hope was principal lady.

To write in and apply for the vacancy was the work of five minutes, and when, three days after he was requested to join at Bradford, he could have shouted for very gladness.

The rest of it is in a nutshell.

The two brought together in such tragic fashion (for both were convinced that it was Trevelyan's hand that had fired the shot) soon came to a perfect understanding, the inevitable result being, later on, one of the prettiest of theatrical weddings in Manchester Cathedral.

By leaps and bounds, the actress came to the front, bearing her mate with her, until, at the time, she was enthralling Londoners with the magic of her genius.

It was with the greatest difficulty that the police could keep the space in front of the stage-door clear.

More than once the intrusively pushing man had been officially given to understand, that if he did not keep in his place he would be removed.

For a time he was quiet. Then, a carriage drove up, out of which a gentleman handed a lady.

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SERIAL STORY COMPETITION.

ANOTHER OPPORTUNITY FOR YOU TO WIN ONE OF THE TEN HANDSOME GRAMOPHONES OFFERED.

WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO.

The picture on this page illustrates a certain sentence in this week's instalment of our powerful new serial "A Foe in the Family." All you have to do is to read the instalment carefully, and to write under the picture the sentence which you think is illustrated by the sketch. Ten splendid Gramophones will be awarded to readers whose correct solutions are posted to us soonest after the publication of this number of *Short Stories*.

Sentence:	*Page* .....
.....	*Column* .....
.....	*Line* .....

In order that all our readers shall have an equal chance of winning these handsome prizes, we have decided to distribute the Gramophones over the British Isles thus:

Two Gramophones will be won by readers living in the London postal district whose correct solutions are posted first.

Two Gramophones will be awarded to readers living within 100 miles of London.

Two to those English readers living over 100 miles from London.

Two to Scottish readers sending in correct solutions and two to those living in Ireland.

When you have found the sentence write it down in the space below the picture, together with the number of the page, the column, and the line. Then put your name and address in the space provided, cut out this page and post it to the Competition Editor, *Short Stories*, Henrietta Street, London, W.C. Mark your envelope in the *top left corner* with the name of your postal town, and the time of posting, thus: MANCHESTER. 2.45 p.m. Then post it *at once*.

Name..... Address.....

Quickly she passed through the swing doors, her companion, after a few words to the coachman, making to follow her.

Shaking himself free of those who would have held him back, the dark-featured man, his eyes alight with an insane glitter, moved out and stood in the doorway, barring the way to the actor.

"Trevelyan!" exclaimed the latter.

"Yes, coward!—Trevelyan!" almost shrieked the unfortunate man.

The words were scarcely out of his lips, when two constables seized him and bore him away; Sidney Marston, whispering to the officers that, as soon as his duty was done, he would visit the station.

At midnight he was there informed that the man had been removed to a hospital whither, early the next morning, he went.

Trevelyan was then near the end, but quite sane.

His voice was wonderfully distinct as he asked Sidney, who bent over him, to let him see the face of "Denice the Divine," just once more.

"Who am I that I should deny him?" said Sidney to himself.

A telegram dispatched to Sloane Street brought the actress to the hospital in less than an hour.

When she arrived, Trevelyan was speechless, but the light in his eyes was no longer evil, as, taking the hand she extended to him between his own two wasted ones, he kissed it reverently, smiled, as if he were quite satisfied, and fell back dead.

"Poor fellow!" said Denice to her husband as they drove home, "I suppose, in his own way, he loved me."

"I suppose so," Sidney answered her.

Ralph Enderby.

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THE TWO PARMENTERS.

The Tale of Two Thefts.

Down the long gravel path, noting the progress of her beloved flowers, sauntered Lady Mayland, smiling as she went.

Everything was bright and fresh and genial. A refreshing summer shower had come and gone, and old Sol, already far on his way to the west, was merrily chasing away the clouds that they might not stay to veil the glory of his reflection on the gentle moon.

Lady Mayland was very happy. Every afternoon, when she heard the grandfather's clock in the hall strike six, there was a gentle flutter at her heart. For any time after six her boy might come back from town. She was foolishly fond of her two big sons—the elder a busy solicitor in London, the other separated by three thousand miles of land and three thousand miles of sea, farming fruits in the Far West.

The Cedars, although in a suburb of London, was a fine old house, standing back from the busy road. Behind were several acres of lawns and flowers and shrubberies, and an old-fashioned orchard that might have been lifted from the side of some Devonshire lane and dropped by mistake within six miles of the Metropolis.

To a little summer-house, nestling away in the further corner of the grounds, Lady Mayland turned her steps, stopping to gather a flower for her boy, and getting her white hands soaked for her pains, for on flower and leaf and stem the raindrops were still quivering like quicksilver in the evening light.

Tea was already laid in the pretty arbour, with its thatch of scented briar and honeysuckle, and the silver teapot murmured softly to itself, like an old hen, surrounded by its brood of cups and saucers.

Cyril was only ten minutes later than usual, but Lady Mayland was quite anxious by the time she heard the joyous bark of Hector as he welcomed his master home, and, after a moment, a hurried step coming up the path.

She drew the tray a little nearer, making a gentle fuss over the spoons, and a moment later a tall young man walked gaily in, swinging an evening paper. He placed his hands caressingly on her shoulder, and stooped to kiss each cheek.

"Why, mother," he said, looking down into her eyes with a loving stare, "you look unusually happy, even for you. Have some more of your chickens hatched?"

Lady Mayland laughed softly.

"Something better than that, Cyril!" she answered gaily, and then, with a touch of reproof, "do you think your mother's only delight is in her chickens?"

"Oh, it's to do with the garden, is it?" asked Cyril provokingly. "Has another chrysanthemum cutting begun to sprout?"

"What a tease you are, you naughty boy!" said Lady Mayland. "No, my news is even better than that. Charlie is coming home."

Tears of joy quivered in her eyes, but Cyril jumped up and kissed them away before they had time to overflow.

"Oh, I am so glad—the villain! It's years and years and years since we have seen him!"

"He is bringing a friend with him," Lady Mayland continued, as her son released her again. "Some man who first saved his life when he had that cruel fever, and afterwards was stricken down with it himself."

"How romantic!" remarked Cyril, devouring sardine sandwiches. "And then Charlie nursed him back to life, and they both owe one another the biggest debt in this world that mankind can incur."

"Charlie is the more deeply involved of the two," answered Lady Mayland, smiling; "it was for his sake the other man incurred his debt."

"That's so, mother mine," Cyril assented. "We must do all we can to free Charlie by devoting ourselves to his friend. I wonder what he will be like?"

Lady Mayland brought out a letter written in a big, boyish scrawl, and read it aloud in her sweet voice, dwelling fondly on some short, ungrammatical passages, so characteristic of the writer, while Cyril finished off the good things spread before him.

"So you see," she said, as she carefully refolded the letter, "they will come by the next boat. They would have arrived in England to-day, but for that tiresome business keeping Charlie in New York."

"Arthur Parmenter, what a curious name!" mused Cyril. "Don't we know someone of that name, mother?"

"No, my dear, I think not," answered his mother; and then they got up and went towards the house.

Dinner over, Cyril followed his mother at once into the drawing-room.

"By the way," he said, wheeling his chair up to his mother's and opening the old-fashioned backgammon-board, "tell me about the burglary at the Rimmels' last night."

"At the Rimmels'!" cried Lady Mayland, with a little start. "You don't mean to say that they have been robbed?"

"That's just like London!" answered Cyril, shaking the dice. "Here you are separated from your next-door neighbour by a low, oak fence, and you don't even know when they're burgled. Here have I been up in town all day, and yet I know more than you. I brought you the *Globe* home to show you the account, but your exciting news made me forget all about it. It was three o'clock this morning, and they took plate and jewellery altogether worth three or four thousand pounds."

"My dear Cyril, how very terrible!" Lady Mayland cried; but she did not finish her sentence, for at that moment the door opened noiselessly, and the old butler, steeped to the roots of his snowy hair in respectability, entered the room.

In his hand he held a silver tray, and on it a card and a letter.

"'Arthur Parmenter'!" she cried, looking at the card. "Heavens, can anything have happened to Charlie?"

She tore open the envelope, Cyril looking over her shoulder, but immediately her fears proved groundless. It was a letter, dictated in some typewriting office, and signed hastily with the initials "C. M."

It was to say that a New York doctor had said Arthur Parmenter must not stay in that city another day, and so had shipped him off by the *City of Paris*, and he didn't know whether he would arrive before his letter or afterwards. "Receive my forerunner as if he were your own son," the letter ended, "and remember I am just on the track, and that it it had not been for him I should not be alive now. He is a dear, good fellow. 'C. M.'"

"Is Mr. Parmenter here now?" Lady Mayland asked.

"Yes, mum."

"Then show him in at once, and take his things up to the spare bedroom."

Lady Mayland rose, and sailed towards the door with a motherly greeting on her trembling lips, for her son's saviour was very dear to her.

Cyril shut up the backgammon-board, and followed her into the hall.

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The first greetings over, Lady Mayland immediately asked :

"And how is Charlie ? You must tell me all about him !"

Parmenter smiled.

"It's strictly against orders, and I dare not disobey," he answered. "Charlie made me vow I would not spoil his coming home by telling all the news. He's bursting with interesting information."

"And he's quite well ?" asked Lady Mayland rather anxiously.

Parmenter soon satisfied her on this point. Charlie had never looked so well all the time he had known him, as when he saw him off on the *City of Paris*.

And so the evening passed, all three in the highest spirits. Arthur had indeed made a most favourable impression.

"I can quite understand Charlie's love for him !" whispered Lady Mayland to Cyril as they said good-night on the landing. "He's a dear boy !"

Three days passed very happily and quietly. There was a flutter of suppressed excitement about the whole house. There was Charlie's room to be got ready, his books to be put out, and he had asked for some clothes to be ordered from his tailor.

"I'm going about in my pyjamas and the top of a dressing gown with the ends cut off for a jacket," he wrote. "I am afraid even Denmark Hill might be shocked to see me dressed like that ; but they don't mind out here."

It was Thursday, and on Monday he would arrive.

"This is the day of Lady Greenfell's ball," remarked Cyril at breakfast, as he opened his letters. "Are you going to chaperon your son, mother ?"

Lady Mayland looked round the great silver urn. "I'm getting too old for such dissipation," she replied, knowing how well he would immediately contradict her.

"That's right !" Cyril said a moment later, the inevitable assent obtained. Then, turning to Parmenter.

"Won't you come, too ? They are always glad to get men, even in London, and it would be a charge for you after a Californian hop."

Arthur Parmenter smiled. He was very handsome, and knew it. "It's against orders," he said, his eyes twinkling. "I'm afraid I mustn't. I'll stop at home and look after the house."

Cyril was obviously disappointed. "What a pity ! I'd like you to see the mater in her war-paint," he said, looking towards his mother with much pardonable pride. "She's ripping in her diamonds. You've no idea. You hear men saying, 'Hullo, who's that girl ? I don't think I know her !' And——"

"Cyril, Cyril !" said Lady Mayland, intreatingly, while the tiniest blush coloured her cheeks. "You must forgive him, Mr. Parmenter," turning to her guest. "We are very fond of one another." This with such an apologetic air that they all laughed.

Cyril had exaggerated nothing in saying that his mother looked ripping in her war-paint. At least so Arthur Parmenter thought as he handed her into her carriage. No one could help admiring those diamonds which had been in the family for years, and no one could wear such treasures with better grace than Lady Mayland.

The ball proved a great success. When about half-way through the programme, a strange gentleman, with long, black hair and a dark moustache, touched Cyril on the arm.

"Excuse my introducing myself," he said in a pleasant voice, which seemed familiar to Cyril ; "I believe you have a nephew of mine staying with you, Arthur Parmenter. I heard of his whereabouts by letter to-day. Perhaps you will say you met Colonel Falbrook."

"Certainly !" answered Cyril pleasantly. "Let me introduce you to my mother ; she is sitting over there, and can tell you more about Parmenter than I can. They are great pals."

They crossed the room together, Lady Mayland gladly making room for her friend's uncle on the sofa. There Cyril left them together.

It was not until they were driving home that Lady Mayland suddenly put her hand to her neck with a little cry.

"My diamonds, Cyril, they are gone !"

Cyril bent down on his knees and groped about on the carriage floor, but they certainly were not there.

He did what he could to comfort his mother. They were bound to be all right, and Lady Greenfell would know them at once if they were picked up in the house. Diamonds like that couldn't mysteriously disappear.

And so they arrived at the Cedars. Arthur Parmenter was waiting to let them in. He was very grieved to hear of the loss of the diamonds, but was so confident they would be recovered that Lady Mayland went upstairs comforted.

Cyril, however, was really very worried, for the necklace was an old family relic and of enormous value. Next morning, after breakfast, he took his friend's arm and strolled out into the garden discussing the lost diamonds.

"I believe even ladies sometimes stoop to that kind of theft," said Parmenter, lighting his cigar. "And if some dowager duchess has taken the stones, there will be little chance of recovering them again."

Cyril moodily assented. Then he said suddenly :

"By the way, it was a great pity you did not come last night in spite of your doctor. I met an uncle of yours, who asked to be remembered to you—Colonel Falbrook by name."

"Oh, yes," Parmenter answered, without much warmth. "I don't know much of him. I wonder how in the world he knew I was here ?"

Then he suddenly paused.

"Are you sure you have not got hold of the wrong name ?" he asked.

"Quite," Cyril answered. He laughed, but felt uneasy, but did not know why.

"Well, Uncle Falbrook is in Paris to-night. There is an extraordinary meeting of the company of which he is a director. I saw it in the evening paper. I say, what was your friend like ?"

"Poetical, long hair, dark moustache, and lisped," answered Cyril sententiously, and smiling again at the other's eagerness.

"Yes, and Uncle Falbrook is bald," answered Parmenter, a peculiar expression overcoming his face. "I tell you what—that's your burglar ! How those rascals get to know things Heaven only knows !"

There could be no doubt about it.

"Don't say anything to the mater about your suspicions," said Cyril, as they parted.

The next day being Friday, Parmenter went up to town with Cyril, both talking confidently about recovering the lost diamonds, and setting Lady Mayland's mind entirely at rest.

Lady Mayland found the day pass very slowly until her son returned, looking very tired and worried, without Parmenter and without any news of the stolen jewels.

"I lost sight of Charlie's friend in Regent Street," he said lightly, although he already had his suspicions. "He will be here by the later train." But he was not surprised to find he was mistaken.

Three days later Charlie turned up and brought with him Mr. Parmenter. But he was a very different Mr. Parmenter from the gentleman who had been entertained for a week at the Cedars.

This was the secret of the thing. Caxton, the great jewel-robber, the "detective's fiend," as he was called in the profession, on account of his astuteness, had hidden himself in Lady Mayland's garden after clearing out the Rimmel's. While hiding there he heard her ladyship reading her son's letter in the arbour, and then the bold idea of personating the invalid friend entered his ever-ready head. He had some cards printed at a cheap lithographers, and then presented himself at the front door with a type-written letter of introduction.

There was no doubt the whole thing was superlatively clever and plucky, especially the way in which he had removed all possible suspicion from himself until he was well out of reach, by robbing Lady Mayland out of her own house and under the disguise of Colonel Falbrook. But he confessed afterwards it was all he could do to get back first, and to leave and re-enter the Cedars without disturbing the servants. **L. Payne.**

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THE CONFESSIONS OF CYNTHIA.

Revelations in High Life by a Lady's Companion.

The writer of this series of true stories acted for many years in the capacity of lady's companion to a Society adventuress who lived by robbing her unsuspecting guests. Names have, for obvious reasons, been altered, but the facts are correct.

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS:

Mrs. FRANCES NORTON	An adventuress who makes her money by robbing her friends.
CYNTHIA HAMILTON .	Her cousin and companion who, when the events related below took place, was quite unsuspicious of Mrs. Norton's guilt.
FLUFFY	An accomplice of Mrs. Norton's.
LORD KINROSS	One of Mrs. Norton's most devoted admirers.
SIR JOHN STRICKLAND	A poor baronet who is deeply in love with Mrs. Norton.
MARY VERNON . . .	At one time engaged to be married to Lord Kinross.
HIRAM PETTIGREW .	An American millionaire.
PERCIVAL HOPE . . .	Pettigrew's secretary.
CASELLIS	A man from Jamaica who knows Mrs. Norton's past history.

Frances Norton: Adventuress.

Cynthia Hamilton: Her companion.

NEW READERS START HERE.

HAVING arrived in England from a Bruges convent to be companion to my cousin, Frances Norton, I soon discovered that my cousin was taking part in midnight card games, at which large sums of money were lost and won. The climax came one night when Mary Vernon staked her diamond earrings (a gift from Lord Kinross), and one of the onlookers found them to be paste. The diamonds, it appears, were stolen by Mrs. Norton.

A few weeks later, my cousin stole a pocket-book, containing about eight thousand pounds in paper money, from Hiram Pettigrew, an American millionaire, at the Café Regal.

We next moved into a house in Pont Street, where Sir John Strickland proposed to Frankie, and was refused.

Later on Lord Kinross called at Pont Street for a private interview, during which Percival Hope entered the room unannounced, and made the startling statement that Mary Vernon had discovered the thief who stole her diamonds, and that in a fortnight's time he would prove that Frankie was an adventuress living upon the proceeds of the robbery of her friends.

The next evening Lady Gaveston, Frankie's chaperon, informed her that she didn't approve of her behaviour towards Sir John Strickland, and that unless she decided at once either to marry or refuse him, she would return to Scotland. My cousin was given a fortnight's grace in which to make up her mind.

We went to the Derby, where Mrs. Curtis-Blount, instigated by jealousy, enticed me to bet heavily, by which I lost £800. Frankie also lost heavily, and to pay our debts, she prevailed upon a young fellow, by promising marriage, to sign his uncle's name to a bill for £5,000.

That same night, at the Duchess of Warminster's ball my cousin came face to face with Casellis, a man from Jamaica, who knew all about her past life. Percival Hope brought him in. It was a critical moment, but once again Frankie scored, for she managed to buy his silence.

The next day marked the end of the fortnight, during which Hope was to obtain proofs of Frankie's guilt. Owing, however, to Frankie's ingenuity, the indictment failed miserably. Kinross then formally asked Frankie to be his wife. They were still in conversation when Sir John Strickland arrived. He had not heard of Frankie's engagement.

Before I could stop him he had gone into the room where my cousin and Kinross were talking. At sight of them he staggered and fell. Doctors pronounced it to be a paralytic seizure.

Frankie being in a desperate strait, then got a large sum of money by worming a state secret out of Dollie Grendale, the wife of an M.P., and selling it to Pettigrew.

Frankie's next adventure was to drug an American billiard player, whose opponent she had backed heavily. When alone she was accused by Pettigrew, who swore to condemn her before the whole world. She secured his silence by managing to be found in his embrace by Lord Chesterton.

My cousin at this time met a Hungarian *attaché*, and fell violently in love with him. One day Lord Kinross called, and Frankie was nowhere to be found. Fearing she contemplated eloping with the *attaché*, Lady Gaveston determined to find her.

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VON ESSLER MEETS HIS MATCH.

I did not dare to question Lady Gaveston as to where we were going, but leant back in the corner of the carriage, miserable as could be. Her ladyship sat bolt upright, her mouth shut so tight that it reminded me of a steel trap. I had not heard the directions she had given the coachman ; but, as we drove up Piccadilly and neared St. James' Street, I realised that our destination was Von Essler's flat.

I shivered with apprehension as the carriage stopped, following milady up the stairs with a sinking heart. There was going to be a terrible struggle between Frankie and her chaperon ; and though, for my cousin's sake, I hoped Lady Gaveston would get her own way, still I felt sorry. Suppose, after all, Frankie declined to give up the Hungarian and persisted in marrying him in defiance of Kinross, the Gaveston and conventionality ? I caught my breath at the bare idea.

Her ladyship gave a sharp, short, severe knock at the door. There was quite a long interval before anyone opened it. Just as milady was about to pull the bell, however, Von Essler's valet appeared.

" His master was engaged ; he was, in fact, about to start for the Continent. Any message or——"

Lady Gaveston brushed both the man and his protestations aside, and calmly walked unannounced into the dining-room. I followed close behind.

Frankie and Von Essler were finishing dinner. Hat boxes and wraps were scattered round the room, the usual impedimenta of travelling. My cousin wore a dark tweed gown, and her cloak, lined with sable, hung over a chair.

I grew pale as I noted these things—signs and portents of a journey.

" Lady Gaveston," said my cousin, rising as we entered—" and Cynthia ! I *am* glad to see you, dear, and you, too," and she smiled at milady.

The descendant of the Scotch Covenanters, however, was not to be softened by sweet words or smiles. She had come to give battle, and went straight to the point. Ignoring Von Essler's outstretched hand, she motioned to the clock.

" Do you see the time ? " she said. " It's a quarter to eleven."

" I did not know it was so late," said Frankie. " We must make haste, Reichardt, or we shall be late. You see, dear "—it was Lady Gaveston she addressed in this surprised fashion —" Von Essler and I are leaving for the Continent to-night. We're running away to get married. I know I ought to have told you ; it's too bad to have kept you and little Cynthia in ignorance. But," she laid her hand on milady's shoulder and gazed appealingly in her eyes, " it is *so* hard to explain," she said. " Won't you take things for granted, Lady Gaveston ? Scold me if you like, but let me go quietly and in peace."

Her ladyship remained immovable, staring her down with cold, stern eyes.

" I have arranged for you to receive a letter and inclosure from me in the morning," Frankie added. " My banker has received instructions to that effect. As for Cynthia, I thought perhaps she'd stay in Pont Street till I send for her. I—I——" She paused. There was something almost terrifying in Lady Gaveston's silence. " I don't think there's anything else to say," she went on hurriedly, " except to thank you for the kindness, and perhaps I should add, forbearance, you have shown me during the last six months."

She paused. Milady gave a peculiar rasping kind of cough. Then :

" Have you said all you wish me to hear, Frances ? " she asked.

" Yes, I think so."

" Then I must trouble you to listen to me. Will you explain how it is that you, who are engaged to marry Lord Kinross in a matter of six weeks' time, how it is, I say, that you are here in this man's rooms "—she pointed contemptuously at the Hungarian—" at eleven o'clock at night ? "

Von Essler sprang forward to answer her, but Frankie quickly interposed.

" I have already told you that Reichardt and I are going to get married. We prefer to have the ceremony performed quietly in Paris, and so escape the talk, the gossip, that would get about if we were married here ! "

" *Married !* " said Milady scornfully. " How do you know he's in a position to take a wife ? "

The question seemed to goad the Hungarian to fury. He turned white with rage.

" Do not listen to the croaking of this ill-omened woman ! " he said crossing over to my cousin. " She cannot stop you, beloved, you are mine, you are pledged to come with me, and you are coming. Why remain to hear her insults and her gibes ? Come "—he threw open the door—" let us leave her in possession of the field. We must hurry, you and I, or we shall be too late."

He spoke rapidly, but his voice was unsteady. He glanced vindictively yet apprehensively at Lady Gaveston. He seemed half fearful of what she might be going to say.

" Come ! " he placed his arm protectingly about my cousin's shoulders, and moved her through the door.

" Reichardt ! " said Frankie appealingly. Then : " Well, if it must be, I will go ! " She kissed her hand to me, linking her arm in his. Together they crossed the threshold, a moment later and the door would have closed—closed behind them—when Lady Gaveston lifted her voice in recall.

" Go but a step further," she said, " and I will summon those that will enforce your return. Aye," as Reichardt faced her with a sneer, " I mean it—the ill-omened woman has still some influence in high places. The widow of Travers Gaveston is not lightly to be set aside. Listen to me here, or," she pointed an accusing finger, " I go now this minute to the Austrian Embassy. They will hear with patience what I shall have to tell them."

Von Essler hesitated. He grew even paler, and caught his underlip between his strong white teeth.

" We had better hear her, dearest," he said, " or she may make a scene. Lady Gaveston," he turned abruptly, " I will listen to you for five minutes, at the end of that time——" he shrugged significantly, and took out his watch. " Time presses, I must ask you to make haste."

Milady turned to Frankie.

" You prefer to go away with this stranger rather than remain and be respectably married to an English gentleman ? "

Frankie nodded.

" Yes," she said softly, " it sounds foolish for me to say so, Lady Gaveston, but I'm ready to give up everything for Reichardt."

" Has he told you that marriage with you would necessitate his giving up his career in the diplomatic service, your rank not being equal to his ? "

" Yes," Frankie sighed ; " but he won't mind that ! " and she smiled radiantly.

" Has he told you," milady asked again, " that his father will not only disinherit him if he marries you, but cut off his allowance ? "

" I gathered as much," Frankie said softly.

" Has he told you," the relentless questioner went on, " he is entirely dependent on that allowance, and that without it he will be *penniless ?* "

Frankie darted an eager look at Von Essler.

" You should have told me, dear," she said. " I did not know you were giving up so much as that. But," she turned to milady, " Reichart has friends and influence ; he will soon get an appointment. And I——" She paused, a touch dismayed.

" And you imagine, I suppose," her ladyship sneered, " that you are the sort of woman who could patiently endure poverty, provided it was seasoned with love ! You, whose extravagant whims are a bye-word even among your thriftless companions. You have lost your senses, Frances ! "

" Not quite, Lady Gaveston. What I have in the bank, together with my jewels, comes to about £10,000. Reichardt has nearly as much. We can make a tolerable show on £20,000 for a year if we live abroad. At the end of that

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TURN TO THE FIRST PAGE FOR OUR NEW SERIAL, "A FOE IN THE FAMILY."

time"—she smiled and threw out her hands—"Von Essler's father will have relented, or a beneficent government will have found Reichardt a lucrative position. For the present I can only see a year ahead—a year!" She turned to Reichardt with a look of trust, of confidence, of love such as I had never before seen on Frankie's face.

"And now, I think," she went on gently, "the five minutes must be up. You have seen for yourself that Reichardt has not deceived me, he has told me exactly how matters will stand between him and his family if he marries me. But he is content to take the risk, and I——"

"You will never be Von Essler's wife, Frances," said her Ladyship firmly, "*never*."

"Why?" My cousin looked startled and came close to Lady Gaveston.

Milady paused.

"You're a vain and worldly, and I fear a godless woman, Frances," she said at last. "I make no doubt the Lord will chasten you in his own good time. But I'm loth to forestall Providence, therefore I would refrain from answering your question."

"But you *must* answer it. No," as Reichardt strove to interfere, "there's something behind all this, something I will, I must understand. What do you mean? Answer me? I will be told."

Lady Gaveston's grim face softened, and her figure, rigid and upright, relaxed.

"My dear," she said—it was the only time she ever called my cousin "dear"—"I am sorry for you. But if you will know I cannot refuse to answer. You cannot marry Von Essler because he already has a wife!"

Frankie put out her hands and clutched the table; her face lost all its colour, it seemed to turn quite grey."

"No," she said, "not that. Reichardt——"

"Do you suppose," Lady Gaveston went on coldly, contemptuously, "that a man like Von Essler would give up place, position, wealth, the obligations that society imposes on a man like him, for the sake of what you're pleased to term 'love'? You were not a child, Frances, to believe such nonsense."

"But this is *true*. Reichardt, tell her it's true. Say you are not married, that it's a mistake, that you have no wife, *Reichardt!*"

He came at her call, soothing her by word and gesture. But when he put his arms about her, to draw her trembling to his side, my cousin put him from her.

"No," she said, "no. Not till you've told me if what Lady Gaveston said is true. Have you a wife?"

Von Essler flushed. "I have," he said between his teeth.

"When did you marry her?"

The Hungarian hesitated. "Is it needful to go into further details?" he said quietly, almost humbly.

"I insist on knowing," was the answer. "When did you marry her?"

"Some two years back. She is very wealthy, the match was arranged by our respective families. Neither of us had much voice in the matter. But you—I love you passionately, adoringly."

For a moment my cousin stood irresolute. Then as the meaning of all that he had said came home to her, as she realised the baseness, the selfishness of the man for whom she had been ready to sacrifice so much, she started forward and tightly clasped him by the arms.

"Before Heaven," she said hoarsely, "you have no conscience; you're hard, hard, callous, and cruel. You vowed you loved me. You left me no peace, no rest, until I'd sworn to throw over home, friends, the man I'd promised to marry, for your sake. And all the time you were playing a part. You, who vowed I should never regret the step you persuaded me to take. You, who vowed you would love me for ever—for ever. My God"—she threw out her hands in an agony of suffering. "To think I should have believed so base, so mean a thing as you. To think I should have sorrowed I was not more worthy of your love. To think I should have been so blind, so infatuated as not to realise what you were. *Love!* You don't know the meaning of the word. Self, self, and self again is all you think of, is all you understand. Oh, I am punished indeed for having put aside my worldly wisdom. Think of it, I"—she gave a scornful, bitter laugh—"I to imagine the world well lost for love! What have *I* to do with love?" Her face changed, she fell back, and for a moment there was silence in the room, silence save for her quick, distressful breathing.

Leaning against the sideboard, her face ashen, her lips white, she stared before her with eyes wide with a helpless, a hopeless despair.

Von Essler, thinking the storm was over, and that the calm that had ensued signified peace, perhaps forgiveness, came towards my cousin.

"Dearest," he said softly, "my love for you is my excuse." He touched her lightly on the arm, and gazed at her beseechingly.

The touch of his fingers seemed to rouse her. With a swift and sudden gesture she leant towards the table, reaching past him. I saw the blade of a knife flash through the air, then without cry or call she threw herself upon him and plunged the weapon in his side.

"She's killed me," he cried in a hoarse, strangled voice, and, with a crash, fell back across the table—horribly still.

I can see the scene before me now. The room blazing with light, furnished with the luxury that wealth and taste command, the table spread with glittering plate, rich wines and hot-house fruits—and in the midst of all the luxury, the wealth, that figure silent, still, thrown back upon the table. The Venetian glass lay shivered in fragments upon the floor, the snowy napery was stained, stained with a thin stream of crimson blood which trickled from his side, dripping with a horrible monotony on the carpet at his feet.

I could not bear the sight, terror seized hold of me.

"Help, help!" I screamed; I fell upon my knees paralysed with fear.

I heard Lady Gaveston lock the door, and was dimly conscious that she had thrust Frankie into an adjoining room. Then I felt a dash of water thrown briskly in my face.

"Get up," said milady brusquely, "unless you want to ruin Frances. Get up and help me move Von Essler. Don't pay any attention to *that*"—the valet was knocking furiously at the door. "Do as I tell you, but remember you must be quiet; no tears or anything of that sort." Swiftly she drew the lounge up to the table, and with silent, sinewy strength—and some slight assistance from me—placed Reichardt upon it.

Then she unlocked the door and called the valet.

"Your master has hurt himself," she said laconically. "Go for a doctor, the nearest. Then take a cab to the Austrian Embassy with this note," and she hastily scribbled a few lines on her card.

The valet, with a terrified glance at his master, seemed about to expostulate. Milady, however, gave him no time to question. "Do as I tell you at once," she said. "If you chatter about what you see here"—she motioned to the lounge—"you will lose your place. I will see to that. Go!" And fearful of her wrath the man departed.

It seemed an age before the doctor, a quiet, self-possessed man, whose very presence inspired confidence, made his appearance. Close on his heels came an emissary from the Embassy. He was, I have reason to believe, a person of considerable importance. He waited gravely till the doctor, his examination completed, gave his verdict.

"The wound is deep, but it is not likely to prove fatal." The man of science rapidly dressed and bound up the wound as he spoke.

Lady Gaveston nodded approval.

"I suggest the patient is removed at once to a private ward in a hospital," she said. "This gentleman, when I have spoken to him, will, I am sure, agree with me," and her ladyship

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beckoned the Emissary to follow her. Together they went out.

No sooner had they gone than the door of the inner room in which Frankie was concealed commenced to open inch by inch.

The doctor saw it move, and walked towards it.

In a moment I had flung myself before him. Whatever happened, he must not know who was concealed there. Somehow or other I felt convinced Lady Gaveston would arrange things so as to avoid a scandal about Frankie. The Austrian person, I was sure, would second her endeavours, so would Von Essler. But if this man, this meddling doctor, caught sight of my cousin, it would be far more difficult to hush the matter up.

"You can't go in," I gasped, and set my back against the door.

"Nonsense," he said, lightly brushing me aside, "nonsense!"

If only Frankie would lock the door! If she kept her presence of mind all would yet be well.

Alas! there was no key in the lock! The doctor turned the handle, opened the door—my cousin swept into the room.

"Is your patient better?" she said calmly, for all the world as though the situation was an ordinary, everyday sort of affair.

"About the same," returned the doctor, in as composed a fashion. "He will not recover consciousness just yet." As he spoke his quick eyes ran over her tall figure, noted the tweed travelling dress, spied out the crimson stain upon her skirt—I doubt not he drew his own conclusions from them all.

Then—"Mrs. Norton, I think?" he said pointedly.

Before Frankie had time to answer Lady Gaveston and the Austrian *attaché* reappeared.

"I've telephoned to the Charing Cross Hospital," said the latter. "They are willing to receive my friend at once. Will it injure him to be taken in a carriage, or shall we have an ambulance?"

"A carriage will do," said the doctor dubiously.

"Then, with your permission, we will remove him immediately. There are four of us—you, myself, and the two servants. We can easily carry him downstairs."

The doctor nodded and bent over his patient. Lady Gaveston, taking advantage of his preoccupation, passed unnoticed into the inner room, Frankie and I behind her.

For the next fifteen minutes we listened with painful, strained attention to what was happening at the other side of the door. Once Reichardt moaned, and Frankie winced at the sound. For the most part, however, only the doctor's softly spoken directions, and the measured tread of the men as they carried Von Essler down the stairs, came to our ears.

When the door of the flat finally closed behind them, milady gave a sigh of relief and returned to the dining-room.

"Thank God!" she said reverently, "that things are no worse! Frances, take this." She poured out some brandy and handed it to my cousin, who obediently drank it up. Her ladyship forced a similar dose on me, and then, grave and dignified as ever, ushered us down the stairs, out into the street, where our carriage was still waiting.

"Home," she said laconically to the coachman. Our adventures for that night were over.

The next day and the day after Frankie remained in her room. She only saw Lady Gaveston. I learnt from the latter, however, that my cousin was fairly well. As for Von Essler, not a hint had got abroad concerning the events of that dreadful night. It was currently reported that he had gone to Paris for a change. No one, not even the smartest of smart society papers, knew that he was lying in hospital, much less that he had been wounded, and by whom.

Lady Gaveston interviewed Lord Kinross, and convinced that gentleman that Frankie's indisposition would not allow her to receive him.

"She wants a change, Lady Gaveston," he said anxiously. "She'll be better once she's out of London. We were to go to Cowes on Saturday, you know, and to-day is Thursday. Will she be able to travel by then?"

"I think so. I return to Scotland to-morrow, Lord Kinross."

"Are you not going to Cowes with Frankie?"

"No, my arrangements will not permit of it."

"At any rate, I may hope to see you at our wedding?"

"Thank you, I fear not. But if I can arrange it I will come."

"You've been very good to Frankie, Lady Gaveston. I have much to thank you for."

He spoke earnestly, and with evident sincerity. I wondered if by any chance he could have heard a rumour as to what had happened at Von Essler's.

"I've done my duty, no more," said milady. Then, as if urged by a sudden thought, "I hope you will find happiness in your marriage," she said slowly, "and that Frankie will make you a good wife."

"I'm sure of that," he answered.

Milady made a salutation and gracefully retired; not, however, without a faint sniff, significant that whatever Kinross felt about the future she still had her doubts.

The next day, clad in the same homespun skirt and identical deer-stalker hat in which she had made her first appearance at Pont Street, Lady Gaveston departed.

She had a long talk with Frankie before she left. I fancy she gave my cousin good advice for her future while strongly reprobating her past. What was more to the point, she helped my cousin to disentangle her accounts, and I believe reduced the chaos of unpaid bills to something like order.

"Frances will go to Kinross with a fairly clean sheet if she does as I tell her," her ladyship remarked.

Frankie accompanied her ladyship downstairs, and put her carefully into a cab—she had insisted on chartering a growler. For a moment they stood together on the pavement, the beautiful young woman and the dour Scotch widow.

"Good-bye, and thank you," said my cousin.

Lady Gaveston wrung her hand.

"I would hope for your happiness, Frances," she said, "but the Lord has a long memory!"

And then the cab drove off, and we knew the "testifier" no more.

"That's over," said Frankie, "and thank goodness for it." Slipping her arm round my waist, she took me upstairs.

Not a word did she say of Von Essler, nor indeed did she mention any of the events of the past six months. Her talk was all of the future.

"I'm going to make Hartland a real good wife," she said. "It isn't difficult to be good on thousands a year. I've sold my goods and chattels for just on three thousand pounds. "Moreover, I'm going to settle my debts—as many as I can. I shall have very little left. Two or three hundred, no more. Still, Clairette will let me have my trousseau on credit. Imagine, Cynthia, this time to-morrow we shall have left Pont Street, never to return."

We had a nice dinner together, and Kinross sent a beautiful basket of lilies with a loving message. Frankie announced her intention of going first thing in the morning to pay her bills.

"And then," she said, "another page in my life will have ended. I declare I will drink to forgetfulness," she said, and poured out a glass of champagne. Still smiling, she rose to her feet. "Here's to forgetting Sir John, Toby, Pettigrew, Reichardt"—even as the toast was on her lips there came a ring at the front door. My cousin waited, glass in hand, until the servant entered.

"Dr. Musgrave," he announced, "to see you on important business." Musgrave was the man who had attended Von Essler!

My cousin set down her glass and gave a little shudder.

The page was not ended yet! From the past there stretched a threatening hand. A hand that threatened ruin.

Dr. Musgrave had got Frankie firmly in his toils—and she knew it.

(Another adventure is recorded next week.)

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THE TALE OF A CLOCK.

Chubb's clock got out of order recently, and began to strike wrong.

That was the cause of the fearful excitement at his house a short time since.

They were all in bed sound asleep at midnight, when the clock suddenly struck *five*.

The new servant girl, happening to wake just as it began, heard it and bounced out of bed under the impression that morning had come; and, as it is as dark at 5 a.m. in winter as it is at midnight, she did not perceive her mistake, but went down into the kitchen and began to get breakfast.

While she was bustling about in a pretty lively manner Chubb happened to wake, and he heard the noise.

He opened his door cautiously and crept softly to the head of the stairs to listen.

He could distinctly hear someone moving about the room, and apparently packing up the china.

Accordingly he went back to his room and woke Mrs. Chubb, and gave her orders to blow a police whistle out of the front window the moment she heard his gun go off.

Then Chubb seized an old fowling-piece which hung on the wall, and, going down to the dining-room door, where the burglars were at work, he loaded the gun, aimed it, pushed the door open with the muzzle, and fired.

Mrs. Chubb instantly blew the whistle both loud and shrill, and, before Chubb could pick up the fainting girl, the front door was burst open by two policemen, who came into the dining-room.

Seeing Chubb with a gun, and an insensible woman on the floor, they imagined that murder had been committed, and one of them trotted Chubb off to the police-station, while the other remained to investigate things.

Just then the clock struck six.

An explanation ensued from the girl, who fortunately was more frightened than hurt, and the policemen left to bring Chubb home.

He arrived at about three o'clock in the morning, just as the clock was striking eight.

When the situation was unfolded to him, his first action was to jam the butt of his gun through that clock, whereupon it immediately struck two hundred and forty-three, and then Chubb pitched the remains into the dust-hole.

Mr. Chubb has a new clock now, and things are working better.

T. L.

Hetty: "Looking over the dictionary again! Evidently you find it intensely interesting." Bertha: "No, not interesting, but amusing. It spells words so differently from the way I spell them, you know."

First Young Lady: "Do you always buy two kinds of paper?" Second Young Lady: "Always. You see, when I write to Charlie I use red paper; that means love. When I answer Jim's letters I use blue paper, which means 'faithful unto death.' See?"

Mrs. Tasker: "Mrs. Subbubs is too mean for anything." Tasker: "Why do you say so?" "I hinted and hinted for a month that she should let us have her baby chair, which her boy has outgrown, and she didn't notice; but as soon as I went and bought one, she said: 'Why, you might have had mine.'"

Pretty Servant-girl (who has been taken half a mile beyond her destination): "It's really too bad; I told you when I first got in where I wished to be set down." 'Bus Conductor: "Well, miss, I let you get out as soon as ever I could find it in my 'art to part with you."

Is Your Birthday This Week?

We have recently secured the services of a well-known astrologer, and below will be found his information for this week's birthdays.

October 7. — Those whose birthdays fall to-day will have an unsettled year. Not a time to speculate. Will be inclined to voyage.

Girls will need some caution in love affairs; attentions from married men.

The day is good for dealing with military men, but have a care against being deceived, and avoid promising things.

A child born to-day will be unsettled, and if born near noon it will go abroad. Will be active and daring.

October 8.—An unfortunate birthday; trouble in business and home affairs. Better for clerks and those who live by salary.

Girls will meet with anxiety in love matters, and quarrels may break off any engagement, or third parties interfere.

The day is not good for marriage, travel, or entering new premises. Guard against mishap.

A child born here will be careless, lack energy and enterprise. Will be cunning and headstrong.

October 9.—Much anxiety in business and general affairs. Those in employ will be in danger of losing it.

Girls born near six and ten p.m. will be perplexed over love affairs.

The day is not good for asking favours, commencing new undertakings, but rather good for buying and selling.

A child born to-day will be subject to many crosses in life, will be inventive, and generous, but the health will not be good.

October 10.—Business and health will require some extra care during the next twelve months. A heavy, dragging time generally.

Young girls will meet with disappointment in love matters; engagements may be broken.

An evil day for most things; go quietly and let others make the first move.

A child born here will be moody and over cautious. If a girl, unhappiness in marriage.

October 11.—A prosperous year for business and domestic affairs. Some bother over letters and young people.

Girls will have attentions, and become engaged, or marry.

The day is good for pleasure seeking, marriage, visiting, buying and selling. Be careful over signing papers.

A child born to-day will be fortunate in life; the mind will be frank, cheerful, and artistic. Will be fond of things uncommon.

October 12.—Not a very fortunate time; unsettled, and some danger of law. Keep control of passion and speech.

Girls will quarrel, and much worry arise in love affairs. Place little confidence in opposite sex.

A child born here will be successful, but obstinate and rash. Will be subject to accidents; mischief through false friends.

October 13.—Business and domestic matters go well; some care with health should be observed.

A good year for girls to marry; seek introductions, and mix with friends.

The day is good for marriage, letter-writing, buying and selling, dealing with shipping agents, and professional men.

A child born here will be lucky in most things. The disposition will be affectionate, generous, and active.

Asturel.

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THE GREATEST FRIEND SHE HAD.

The Love of a War Correspondent—and another.

Doris Beversley led the way to the verandah, seating herself nervously beside her partner on a divan.

From within the house came the faint, alluring strains of the Blue Danube waltz. Without, the faint summer breeze soughed gently through the trees, tenderly stirring the soft, wavy hair of the girl, who sat silent, staring ahead with unseeing eyes. Her partner, Jan Derwent, was a journalist whom luck had placed in easy circumstances. In fact, he was a rising author, had published a book which fortunately proved a success, and wrote for the majority of the leading magazines. Above middle height, dark, the possessor of a graceful figure, and with a mild freshness about his youthful face, which seemed peculiarly unsuited to his profession, Jan Derwent had a year previously caught the fickle fancy of Doris Beversley, who straightway commenced an ardent flirtation.

Eminently a flirt Jan Derwent had ably seconded her endeavours to weave a love romance, and all went well for a year. Then Doris Beversley cooled off, leaving the young journalist to realise to his chagrin, that what he had deemed mere flirting was in reality the outcome of love.

For once in his life he felt that further existence was not necessary to him. Maturer reflection, however, conceived the desire to be revenged on Captain Anstruther, who has supplanted him in Doris Beversley's affections, till this too was lost to thought in a wild longing to regain the ephemeral love which he had lost.

"Jan."

Doris Beversley was the first to break the tense silence which reigned.

"Yes, Dolly."

"I'm awfully sorry that you should be so down in the dumps about me!" she said tremulously, holding her fan in a tense yet nervous grip which bade fair to snap its slender supports. "I—I'm not worth it."

"I down in the dumps?" replied Derwent, with well simulated levity. "My dear Doris, our flirtation has come to an end, so I am getting up a new one with Minnie Raynor. That's all. It is not as if I had really been in love with you."

A dull flush mounted to Doriss temples, as her eyes fell before his glance. She did not notice the pallor of his face, grown strangely drawn within the last few moments.

"Nice girl Minnie Raynor!" he murmured reflectively.

"Do you like her?"

She felt piqued at his apparent unconcern.

"Rather! She is the nicest girl I have ever met."

"Thank you, Jan!"

"Oh, of course I except you, Dolly, present company is always excepted.

"Our—our flirtation was very pleasant whilst it lasted, was it not, Jan?" She raised her violet eyes to his in the soft glow of the Chinese lanterns; she appeared supremely happy.

"Yes—too pleasant!" he answered, with a sigh. "It was too pleasant for my peace of mind."

She toyed with her fan thoughtfully for a few moments, then said wistfully:

"I am sorry that our little romance is over."

"It is your fault, Dolly, that such is the case," he said, bitterly. "A year ago to-day we entered into a secret engagement. You were then twenty. How I loved you at twenty, Dolly! How I——"

"Hate me at twenty-one, I suppose." The violet eyes hardened momentarily.

"One can never hate where one has once loved," replied Jan tensely. "I love you, Dolly—God help me, I always shall—but that does not prevent me saying that you have been cruel—wantonly cruel to me!"

"I never thought that you cared for me."

"If I had not cared for you, do you think I should have stood up for you in that big row, six months ago? Fashionable London cut you then, Dolly; if it had not been for me wringing the truth from Clifford Wright, it would have done so still! Oh, Dolly, I wish I—that I were a year younger."

"Why, Jan?"

"That I might once again live over the happy time of our—our flirtation," he answered, slowly.

"So do I!" The answer came unexpectedly.

"Anstruther might object to the arrangement."

"I fail to see what Captain Anstruther has to say to any arrangement which I may choose to make," replied Doris, coldly. "I am not in love with him."

"No?" Derwent gazed at her wonderingly.

"I am in love with no one—at least whom I could marry."

"No more am I—now!" answered Derwent, sadly.

"Besides, he has no money!" continued Doris, reflectively.

"If Anstruther had money—would you marry him?" The question was posed tentatively.

"I might!" She shrugged her shoulders, then laying her slim white hand on his arm, said gently: "Don't be cross, Jan. After all, dear, you are a mere boy and he—well, he is a man."

Jan Derwent coloured.

"He is thirty," he muttered, "I am only twenty-two! I suppose age does make a difference with a girl?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Oh, I don't know!" she said, half petulantly. "But enough of reminiscences! Tell me about yourself. What are you doing now?"

"For the moment magazine scrawling," he answered, dully. "Next week, however, I leave for the Indian frontier as War Correspondent for the *Daily Wire*.

The smile died from her lips as the lovely features grew set.

"War correspondents get shot sometimes, do they not, Jan?"

"Sometimes!" He laughed lightly. "There is but little chance of that happening to me though."

"I wish that I were a man—I would come with you."

"Would you?" He smiled. "I am afraid the life would be too rough a one for you."

Her reply was stifled by the coming of Captain Anstruther on to the verandah.

"Your dance, is it not, Miss Beversley?"

"I think it is! You will come and see me before you go, won't you, Jan?"

"I will not fail." Derwent rose and bowed, as Doris slipped her arm through that of Anstruther.

Six days elapsed before Doris saw Jan Derwent again.

"I'm off in two days' time, Dolly," he said, by way of greeting, as he was ushered into her presence. "When you read the news in the *Daily Wire*, think of me, won't you? I hear Anstruther is ordered out. If he does anything noteworthy, the 'boy,'" he smiled wistfully, "will puff the 'man' up, for your sake."

She squeezed his hand gratefully.

"I don't know why you should be so good to me," she said slowly.

"Am I not your friend?"

"I have been a very poor one to you. Jan, must you go?"

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"Rather!" He laughed lightly. "My dear Dolly, there is a fellow named Harrison up at the office who is simply dying for me to throw up my position so that he can jump into my shoes."

"Can you forgive my horridness?"

"You have not been horrid, Dolly dear," said he, gently. "It is I who have been foolish! You never loved me. I—I mistook friendship for a deeper sentiment."

"I—I don't think that I love anyone, Jan; but I do like you!"

"As a friend, eh, Dolly? You won't refuse to be my friend?"

"To be your friend? No, of course I should not, Jan. People told me that you were playing with my love. I almost begin to think that you really did care for me."

"Perhaps in a little while I may be able to prove to you the extent of my love," he said moodily. "Good-bye, Doll."

The hand he placed on hers was icy cold. The touch chilled her.

"What made you become a war correspondent?" she asked.

He blushed awkwardly.

"Well, Jan—why?"

"So that I might be able to forget that such a person as Doris Beversley ever existed!" he said, after a pause.

She hesitated a moment, but did not withdraw her hand.

"Jan"—her voice faltered—"does your sister know the reason?"

"No; I am alone in the world, so to speak. A unit anent the fate of which none would trouble. If I died in India there is not a soul to care."

"I should, Jan," she replied gently. "Do you not believe me?"

"Would you? You are kind!" He paused, then said: "Good-bye, dear."

"Jan!" A wave of colour suffused her face.

"What, dear?"

"You said that a man named Harrison would only be too pleased to jump into your shoes if——"

"Captain Anstruther!"

The servant's voice froze the words which surged to her lips before she had time to utter them. Grasping his hand, she whispered—

"Good-bye, dear. Come to-morrow, I have something which I must tell you before you go! Don't fail to come, Jan!"

The next moment Anstruther was ushered into the room, and as Doris turned to greet him with smarting eyes and a dry, strained feeling in her throat, Derwent passed out of her sight into the street to hail a hansom.

"For me there must be no to-morrow!" he muttered hoarsely to himself as he sank back in the cab. "I'm not iron, and I would sooner die than go through what I did to-day. It would unman me! I will write instead."

Thus it came about that Doris waited in vain for the advent of Jan, to make the confession he would have given his right hand to have heard.

* * * * *

Six weeks elapsed before war news, "By our special correspondent," appeared in the *Daily Wire*, which Dolly read with almost feverish anxiety and avidity.

Meanwhile out in India a fierce fight was raging on the frontier. The Afridis had surprised a reconnoitring party.

By a strange coincidence Captain Anstruther and Jan Derwent were members of that ill-fated little band, which, despite a heroic resistance, were routed by the fierce tribesmen.

The rout was followed by flight, Captain Anstruther and Derwent bringing up the rear.

The gallant little band, but fourteen all told, tore along the narrow gorge, a hundred semi-maddened Afridis thundering in pursuit, flinging their spears at the retreating soldiers as they ran.

One of the flying weapons struck Captain Anstruther as they neared a bend where the gorge was narrowest. Luckily it was a spent one, yet it ripped his shoulder, making him reel as he staggered forward, with ever slackening speed.

"By gad, I think that I am done this journey, Derwent!" gasped Anstruther. "The pace is killing, I can't hold out at this speed."

"Then make what haste you can," retorted Derwent, his face hardening.

"Run on, I'll keep these beggars at bay."

"Rot, man!"

"Paddle on," interrupted Derwent, peremptorily. "It's for Dolly's sake. She loves you. She told me so. So long!"

He held out his hand, which the other gripped.

"I can never marry her," cried Anstruther. "I'm stony broke."

"You'll find that all right when you get to England. So long."

"But man, you love her as much as I do!"

"That's a lie!" cried Derwent hoarsely. "I hate her—run, man!"

He gave Anstruther a shove.

"I'll bring up the reserves if they are not already on the road," cried the Captain, a consciousness of his cowardice creeping over him. "The place is narrow; keep them at bay, and I'll rescue you. Any message to her, in case I arrive too late?"

"Yes," replied Derwent, briefly. "Give her my love—my dearest love, old man, and tell her—the 'boy' died game! Run, man, for God's sake, run! Here they come."

Then, alone with a revolver in one hand and his sword in the other, he awaited the rush of the shrieking tribesmen.

Two days later Doris Beversley started from her chair with a cry of horror. It was some time before she could fully realise that the Special Correspondent of the *Daily Wire*, whom the paper had lauded to the skies, and dubbed hero in an obituary notice, and Jan Derwent were one and the same. When the awful significance of the words burnt their way into her fevered brain, a dull moan burst from between her half parted lips.

"Dead!" she cried, dully. "Oh, it must be some hideous mistake. Charlie cannot have left Jan to die in order that he might cover his own retreat. It can't be! It can't be. Yet there is no mistake! The pitiful coward to leave him to his fate!" she exclaimed wildly, crunching the paper passionately between her trembling fingers, "the pitiful coward!"

For a few moments she stood silent, her hands pressed to her throbbing temples, till pent up Nature asserting itself, she sank on to a sofa, and burying her face in its cushions sobbed as if her heart would break.

"Dead, dead!" she sobbed. "If he had only come before he sailed; and he died thinking I loved another man, when it was only him—him, I loved! Oh, God! how cruel—how cruel it all is, when I loved him so."

Two months elapsed, then a letter came from Jan Derwent's solicitors, inclosing another in his handwriting, addressed to—

MISS DORIS BEVERSLEY.

To be forwarded in the event of my decease.

She stared at the superscription, glanced mechanically at the solicitor's letter, surprise stamped on every feature; then tearing open Derwent's letter, read as follows—

> DEAREST DOLLY,—As my solicitors have informed you, I nominate you my heir. As you know, I had but one relation in the world—my sister. She has married well, and needs for nothing; besides, we quarrelled six years ago. On what subject does not much signify; let it suffice that we quarrelled, so you need have no compunction in accepting the bequest. As you know, I am not a rich man, still my four hundred and fifty pounds per annum may aid you to marry Anstruther. There is besides about sixty pounds owing to me from the magazines, as well as my little account from the *Daily Wire*.—Your affectionate friend, JAN DERWENT.

She stared with parched eyes at the missive, then a great sob shook her frame as she almost reverently kissed the signature

The solicitor's letter was brief and to the point.

MADAM,—We have the honour to inform you that you are the sole legatee of the estate of our late client, Mr. Jan Derwent. We should be pleased if you would favour us with a call at an early date, to arrange for the disposal of same.—Faithfully yours,

GREY, RAINHAM, GREY, AND SON.

"I only thought that such natures existed in novels," she whispered, her lips quivering ominously. "I have made a mistake, Jan, a mistake that will ruin my whole life. All women make one in their lives, so I am not unique. I, however, have lost a lover to be proud of. I have lost my best and truest friend."

Her reverie was cut short by the ushering in of Captain Anstruther. Doris Beversley's greeting was not extraordinarily effusive.

"I am the bearer of a message to you," he said, after a pause.

"From Jan?" the question was asked haltingly.

"Yes; he sent you his love, and told me to tell you that the 'Loy' died game'!"

"To save a man who ran away!" she answered wearily.

Captain Anstruther flushed hotly beneath his tan.

"He insisted on it, dear."

"You ran away and left him to die!" she repeated. Her voice quavered ominously.

"And I was wounded, Dolly, badly!"

"But you ran away! You should have had the Victoria Cross for your bravery," she harped mercilessly. The indignant flash of her eyes was dimmed by the tears which trembled on her lashes.

"He made me!" replied Captain Anstruther hotly. "Besides I went for a rescue party. Met them coming to rescue me, in fact. I took the men to his rescue at the double! I was only five minutes absent from his side, but that five minutes proved to be too long."

A sob was her only answer.

He drew her closely to him and kissed her.

"Derwent said that you loved me!" he said tenderly. "To this——"

She wrenched herself free from his retaining clasp.

"Love you?" she cried, with quivering lips. "I *hate* you! Despise you! How dare you come here with a tale of your own cowardice on your lips and almost in the same breath tell me of your love! I might have cared for you if—if—. Oh, I think I must be going mad when I reflect of what might have been and what now is." The tears were falling fast now. "If only—I had a memento—of him." She was coherent at last, and understandable to the amazed Captain Anstruther.

"I thought that you might like one perhaps," he said, a deep, gnawing anguish at his heart. "Therefore I brought you something which the poor lad treasured, and which I thought you might care for too!"

"Yes—it—is?" she whispered tremulously, biting her nether lip to stay the tears which trembled on her lashes, from falling.

Captain Anstruther took a little lace bedecked square of cambric from his breast, and gave it to her, saying simply as he did so—

"He was holding that tightly when we found him."

She recognised it as a handkerchief which he had stolen from her in their "flirtation" days. It was crumpled and torn now, with the embroidered lettering of her name sullied by a dark, sinister stain.

"You are right," she answered tremblingly. "I shall indeed treasure it as being my most precious possession. The monument of a true man's honest love. Captain Anstruther, do you mind—leaving me, I—I——"

"Good-bye, then, Dolly." He said sadly, as, not noticing her outstretched hand, he walked slowly to the door. "Good-bye. I understand, for I never had any luck—in all my life."

The door closed behind him, and as his footsteps died away on the landing, Doris Beversley raised the torn and smoke-begrimed cambric to her lips and kissed the sinister stain.

H. Morton Baird.

Your Editor Chats.

It is not to be wondered at that since the publication of Cynthia's experiences in *Short Stories* I have been inundated with letters from girls and women who are anxious to follow in this young woman's footsteps.

I never let a chance go by of securing good things for my readers, and I have therefore not only personally interviewed at least a dozen of my correspondents on the subject of the confessions they are willing to make, but have actually read no fewer than eight series of articles written by them.

As may be expected, practically all of the would-be contributors to *Short Stories* have very little of interest to say. What seemed to them most wonderful experiences and most startling adventures were really quite ordinary every-day occurrences, and proved very tame reading indeed. Two of the girls I found to be professional journalists who were willing to write a series of confessions out of their own imaginations! As I explained to them, the articles may have read very well, but the fact of them being fiction would brand them as absurd, and would kill all interest in them.

Only one lady really interested me. She was very cautious in the way she approached me, concealing her real name and address, until she had satisfied herself that I was willing to continue negotiations with her.

And her caution is not to be wondered at. She is very well-known, not only in London Society, but in Society circles abroad. Unhappily, her reputation, so far as money matters is concerned, is not above reproach. Although she has never actually committed a crime, she has accepted money from people for carrying out work she alone could do—work which necessitated a certain amount of underhand business.

She was on four occasions paid money by ambitious parents to get their daughters married to a title. In each of three cases she succeeded within six months, but in the fourth and last case the young girl whom she chaperoned was as wilful as she was lovely. Having conceived an affection for a poor, untitled young man, for many months she absolutely refused to listen to anyone else.

She was quite ignorant of the fact that her parents had promised a big sum to her chaperon if she "went off" well, and the latter was forbidden to tell her.

Whether the chaperon ultimately succeeded in securing for her charge a good "catch" will be told in her experiences. They travelled in good society all over Europe—visiting Paris, Nice, Monte Carlo, Rome, and every centre of gaiety on the Continent. At each place the lovely heiress was besieged by counts, dukes, and barons, and her adventures with some of them are dramatic.

The writer of these articles is now living in poor circumstances in Chelsea, and only the fact that money had to be got somehow has led her to place her experiences on paper.

I have carefully read them, and have cross-examined the writer on certain points. She has produced letters for my private perusal, and cuttings from French and Italian local papers, giving her name and that of her charge as guests at the various hotels at which they stopped.

In a fortnight these articles will begin.

Next week I will tell you more about them.

Your Editor.

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Quite Simple.

He: "This sea bathing makes one's hair an awful job to dry, even for a man. I wonder what on earth your friend here, Miss Longtresses, does with hers?" She: "Oh, leaves it in the machine."

The Tale of a Kiss.

They sat within the parlour dim, and fretfully she said to him: "I wish, dear John, that you'd behave; if not, I wish that you would shave."

Sweet Seventeen.

"I don't believe in the custom of giving engagement rings, do you?" "No; I would a good deal rather have the money spent in sweets and theatre tickets. You can't be expected to give them back, you know."

Things are Altered.

Wife (drearily): "Ah, me! the days of chivalry are past." Husband: "What's the matter now?" Wife: "Sir Walter Raleigh laid his cloak on the ground for Queen Elizabeth to walk over, but you get cross simply because poor, dear mother sat down on your hat."

Killing Two Birds with One Stone.

Robinson: "Just send me up a dozen of oysters, Scaley, will you? Mrs. Robinson's not very well, and the doctor's ordered her oysters. Mind you pick out fine ones. You see, she can't swallow more than a couple at the outside, and I'm obliged to eat the rest myself."

Her Version of it.

Doctor: "I would advise you, dear madam, to take frequent baths, plenty of fresh air, and dress in cool gowns." Husband (an hour later): "What did the doctor say?" Wife: "He said I ought to go to a South Coast watering-place, and afterwards to North Wales, and get some new light gowns at once."

Real Romance.

Young Author: "Would you call my novel realism or romance?" Friend: "What does the heroine say when she accepts the hero?" Young Author: "Oh, she says, 'Yes, dear George, we will tread life's path together, one in heart and purpose, bearing each other's burdens, sharing each other's grief, doubling each——'" Friend: "Oh, that's romance of the first water. A real girl would no more think of making a speech on such an occasion than of singing a song, or dancing the Highland fling."

What Her Heart Said.

Miss Mabella St. Percy: "Mamma, dearest, I have something to tell you." Mamma (anxiously): "Yes, darling?" "Yes, mamma. Mr. Moneybags proposed to me last night." "And what did my little girl say?" "I didn't give him a definite answer, mamma. I wanted to talk to you about it first." "And what does your heart say, dear?" "Oh, mamma, it says—it says—— Oh, mamma, is it really true that Mr. Moneybags will have £10,000 a year at his father's death?" "Quite true, my child, and—and—the old gentleman is very feeble. And now, what does my dear child's heart say?" "Oh, mamma, it says—'yes'!" "My own dear child! I have always wanted to see you married to the man of your choice, to the man you loved and honoured. Bless you, my darling, and may you be as happy as you deserve."

Had Finished Growing.

He: "Do you think you could grow to love me?" She: "I'm afraid not. You see, I've done growing."

A Much Blessed Hash.

Mrs. Jackson (at dinner): "Richard, will you ask a blessing?" Richard (examining hash): "We've blessed everything here before, dear."

Firmly Declined.

Cholly: "And now that you've finished school, Miss Daisy, I suppose you can conjugate love in several languages?" Miss Daisy: "No, but I can decline 'you' in English."

A Great Mistake.

Her mother said the little creature lived on love, but one month after marriage, when the grocery bill came in, he saw that he had made the greatest mistake of his life by not ascertaining what that particular love was for.

Baby Couldn't Tell.

Dr. Mansfield: "My dear Mrs. Jenkins, how could you bring that young baby out on such a cold day—with a strong east wind blowing?" Mrs. Jenkins: "Ah, doctor, you will have your little joke. How can a child of this one's age possibly know what wind it is?"

Not what He Expected.

"Why am I like a pin?" asked Mr. Jones triumphantly of his wife. He expected she was going to say, "Because you are so sharp," and he was simply paralysed when she responded: "Because if you should get lost it wouldn't be worth while to spend time looking for you."

Warned in Time.

"Is this the place," she asked, as she wandered down on the barren sands, "where a young lady—a beautiful young lady—fell in the water last season and was rescued by a gallant young man, whom she afterwards married?" He looked at her carefully, estimated her at a square forty-seven, with false teeth, and said emphatically: "Yes, ma'am, but I don't know how to swim."

Why He Left it There.

Johnnie had been out in the yard playing with his ball, and suddenly came in and sat down to read. His father looked up, and seeing that Johnnie had his Sunday-school book in his hand, thought it time to question him. "What did you do with the ball?" "It went over the wall into Mr. Brown's yard." "Did you go after it?" "No, pa." "Why not?" "Because it went through the window."

Infant Fishes.

To a third party it is sometimes surprising how much pride a large man can take in catching a small fish. Two or three young men were exhibiting, with great satisfaction, the results of a day's fishing, whereupon a young woman remarked, very demurely: "Fish go in schools, do they not?" "I believe they do; but why do you ask?" "Oh, nothing, only I was just thinking that you must have broken up an infant class."

Rather a Jar.

"George," said the beautiful girl as she nestled close to him, "the last time you called you proposed." "I did, sweet one." "And I accepted you." "You did, love." "I presume, George," she went on in her most fascinating manner, "that you look upon me as merely a foolish, thoughtless girl, but—but——" "How can you think so, pet?" he interrupted. "But," she went on in a more business-like way, "I have something of the business instinct of the new woman in me, and—and—I shall have to ask you to repeat the proposal again to-night. The last time you called it was Sunday, and contracts made on that day, I learn, are not legally binding."

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Mr. McVey, of Pump Court, Temple.

In which Love and an Air Pistol Play Prominent Parts.

"So you want to marry my girl, Leyland? I'm sorry, but it is out of the question."

"Mr. McVey!"

"Oh, yes, I know. Of course Marcia loves you; you love her to distraction, and both of you will break your hearts if I withhold my consent. My dear Leyland! hearts are not so easily broken; while as for the love, she, at any rate, would be heart-whole in a month if she didn't see you."

"If you think this," said Alec Leyland hotly, "why, Mr. McVey, did you tacitly encourage my affection for your daughter? You must have seen how matters stood between us; why did you not say before that you would not allow her to marry me?"

"What is your present financial position, and—what are your prospects?" asked John McVey, utterly ignoring the other's question.

"I am not rich, I——"

"That is just it—you are not rich; and Marcia must marry a rich man."

"You would sell your daughter, sir?"

"Certainly not. But you will excuse me, Mr. Leyland, my family affairs are not a subject for discussion with strangers."

"Then all I have to say about it is!" burst out the young fellow with uncontrollable indignation, "that your daughter's happiness is as nothing to you, and that you would brutally give her into the keeping of a man whose only recommendation is, that he has money enough to buy her!"

"That is my business, sir! Yours, I venture to suggest, has nothing in common with those living in my house. I have no more to say. Good night!"

When Alec Leyland had gone down to Richmond that afternoon, it was with the one object of getting John McVey's consent to Marcia's engagement to himself. That the barrister would allow financial considerations to influence his determination, was the very last thought Alec had in his mind. Certainly, McVey had not much practice, his chambers in Pump Court being frequented principally by well-dressed young fellows from the West End, to whom money, not law, seemed the one thing needful; but his domestic establishment and expenditure certainly indicated a more than ordinarily big income.

Then John McVey had displayed no mercenary qualities; rather had he appeared, especially to Alec Leyland, genial and friendly to a degree. The whole thing was a puzzle, which, added to disappointment, and concern for Marcia's future, served to render Alec's exit from the "shanty" peculiarly troublous.

Half way down the lane leading from Mr. McVey's house there was a door in the wall leading into the kitchen garden. This was ajar and as Leyland passed it on his way from the house it opened and a young servant gave him a note.

Hastily glancing at it he just said to the girl "All right!" and hurried away in the direction of the station.

The note ran:

"Dear,—From my own sitting-room I overheard *everything*. Wait on up platform; I *must* see you before you leave for town. Shall not be a quarter of an hour after you. Now, more than ever your own, Marcia."

She did not keep him waiting more than ten minutes, and in a quiet corner of the waiting-room the two sat down to discuss the situation.

"No, dear!" she said, in reply to a remark of his. "I intend only to consider ourselves in this matter. I know this man my father has in mind, and I hate him! I hate him!"

"Darling," said Alec, "there *is* a way out of the difficulty, but only extremity would justify me in proposing it to you."

"Alec, did you but know Sir Roland Sandys, as I know him, there could not possibly be a situation of greater extremity than this."

"Sir Roland Sandys! Why he is a thriftless, almost bankrupt man about town. He is not a rich man!"

"Not just now, perhaps; but my father knows that he will shortly inherit an enormous property on the death of old Lady Sandys, his mother; and as that event is hourly expected, you can see that the danger is very real."

"Tell me, dear, what you would have me do?"

"Nothing, Alec, until I have seen my father! I will write you the result to-night; and then you can go to him to his chambers, and tell him that his daughter's heart is yours; that you have my promise to be your wife, as soon as you can make me so; and that you *know*, that rather than be disposed of to Sir Roland Sandys—for a consideration, I would wish to remain a single woman to the end of the chapter!"

* * * * *

The house in Pump Court in which were Mr. McVey's chambers, was, if possible, darker and more dingy than the majority of houses in that historic place.

The outer door stood open, and Alec Leyland entering, saw a door on which "clerks" was painted.

This room was evidently empty, as no one answered to repeated knockings.

Another door in the entrance passage had "J. McVey, Private," upon it. Here also there was no response to a vigorous summons.

After a moment's pause the visitor turned the handle and went in.

In an armchair by the open window, which looked out upon the backs of other and more ancient buildings, sat John McVey, apparently asleep.

A newspaper was upon his knees, and his head, leaning against the side of the chair, was bent forward.

"Mr. McVey," said Alec, slightly raising his voice.

But the sleeper did not awake.

Alec then made a step or two forward, looking more closely at the man in the arm-chair.

Taking hold of his shoulders to shake and rouse him, the horror-stricken young man saw that a thin stream of blood was slowly trickling from a wound in that side of the head nearest to the window.

John McVey was *dead*.

His head and hands were still warm, showing that the crime, if crime it were, must have been recently committed.

There were no signs of a struggle, but lying on the rug beside the chair was a small but powerful air-pistol.

Alec then heard a step in the outer passage, and, turning round, saw a boyish-looking young fellow, whom he at once judged to be the dead man's clerk, standing in the doorway.

"You had better fetch a policeman," said Alec.

The young fellow who seemed bewildered, without a word and bareheaded, rushed down the creaky old stairway, and across the court out into the Strand.

In ten minutes he returned with a constable and a detective.

Alec Leyland gave his version of the story to the law's representatives, who, after mechanically examining the room, intimated to him that he would have to accompany them to the police-station.

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Then, for the first time, the danger of his position forced itself upon the young man.

He knew that a terrible mistake might easily be made, and that he had absolutely no evidence of innocence, should he be charged with the crime.

As he feared, so it happened. He spent that night in the station cells, charged, on suspicion, with the murder of Mr. McVey.

* * * * *

The magistrate, before whom Alec Leyland was brought on the following morning, was obliged to confess that the police evidence was far from being convincing, although he felt bound to admit that it was in a measure circumstantially suspicious.

The accused had entered the barrister's office, no one, except the dead man, being there, and had been found by the clerk, standing by the body, a discharged air-pistol lying on the ground beside Mr. McVey.

That it was a case of suicide was out of the question, as the barrister could not have held his newspaper in one hand, while he shot himself with the other.

Again, the crime could not have been committed by the clerk, inasmuch as he had been out to the bank; and as a letter was found on his desk, with a pencilled slip in deceased's handwriting. "Deliver this letter when you return. No answer."

The note was addressed to A. Leyland, Esq., and was to the following effect:

"Sir,—After the violent language you used towards me last night, you will be surprised, perhaps, at my writing to you now. My object is merely to confirm what I said at that interview, and to so far explain my position, as to tell you that I am not only not a rich man, but a poor one. Any letters addressed by you to my daughter, or to me, will be returned unopened. Yours faithfully,

"John McVey."

This was practically all the incriminating evidence, but the magistrate, while retaining his own opinion, felt bound to commit upon it. Arraigned at the Old Bailey upon the capital charge, Alec Leyland was acquitted after a brief trial.

A loving note from Marcia reached him almost before the formalities, usual upon acquittal, were completed.

She assured him of her undying affection, and bade him communicate with her without delay.

He replied that he would never cease to love her, but that for her sake he would not seek to gratify it by pressing it upon her. He was going abroad, he said, and prayed that the happiness she so deserved might be hers.

The answer to this, from a little village on the South coast was simply this:

"Dear,—Come to me.—Yours now and ever, Marcia."

He could not refuse her, and the next day travelled down to Ryethorpe.

* * * * *

A lady and a gentleman, both young, and both intensely absorbed, the one with the other, were walking along the front at Brighton (where they had been living for a year or more) in the direction of Kemp Town.

"Alec!" said the lady in a low tone. "Did you notice that man who passed us just now?"

"That seedy-looking chap, with the heavy moustache? Yes, I half thought I recognised him; but I suppose I was mistaken."

"I don't think you were," said Marcia Leyland. "It was Sir Roland Sandys."

"Great Heavens! That out-at-elbows creature, Sir Roland Sandys. Impossible!"

"It was he, I am sure, dear. And, look, Alec! He is waiting there by the corner of that building as if he wanted to speak to either you or me."

"I think it had better be me then. You go back, my darling, and I will follow you in half-an-hour."

He watched his wife on her way back to their lodgings, and then went to meet the man, who evidently had sought him out for some purpose of his own.

"Mr. Leyland?"

"Yes, that is my name, and yours, I take it, is Sandys—Sir Roland Sandys?"

"You recognise me then?"

"It was my wife who recognised you, though I had an indefinite idea that I ought to know you."

"Well, Mr. Leyland, where can we talk undisturbed for a while? I have something to say which I think will do much towards easing both your wife's mind—and your own."

They were at that moment passing a certain old-fashioned hotel, into which Alec led his companion.

A private room was soon secured, and Alec, though wondering at the strangeness of the whole affair, prepared himself to listen. It was certainly a most extraordinary story the baronet had to tell. Briefly, it amounted to this:

Sandys, it seemed, at the time when Mr. McVey met his death, shared some chambers in the block of buildings immediately backing on to the South side of Pump Court, with a friend, one Roger Haik.

This Haik was a man always in monetary straits, and deep in the books of the money-lenders.

John McVey, barrister ostensibly, but really usurer, had, in the course of Roger Haik's short career, contributed to suck the latter completely dry; so that with the wild revengefulness of a desperate man, Haik threatened more than once, in Sandys' presence, to "kill the old Shylock."

Sandys not really believing the threat to have any actual meaning, took no notice of it.

On the day of John McVey's death, however, he returned from the West End to find Roger Haik leaning on the window-sill, and looking steadily down at McVey's open window, through which might be seen the figure of the barrister, sitting in his arm-chair.

Sandys might not have thought so much of it but for the presence, in Haik's right hand, of a small air-pistol, purchased, as he knew, a day or so before by the latter.

In a moment the whole thing was clear to him. Not stopping to exchange a word with the man whom he knew to be a murderer, he plucked the weapon out of the other's hand, and rushed round into Pump Court.

McVey's outer door was open. The baronet made no ceremony, but passing rapidly into the private room, saw his fears confirmed, and laid down the pistol on the floor by the chair side, hoping that the barrister's well-known financial difficulties would procure a verdict of suicide. Then, going as he came, he closed the door behind him, and returned to his own chambers.

That night he and Roger Haik, collecting all their available resources, got away to France.

There, three weeks before this Brighton meeting, Haik had succumbed to a knife wound incurred in a street brawl in Paris.

Before he died he so far repented having been the direct means of imperilling Alec Leyland's life, that he begged his old boon-companion, Sandys, to communicate the facts to either John McVey's daughter or to her husband.

Seriously implicated, as an accessory after the fact, Sandys expressed his intention to leave again for parts unknown, begging only that public acknowledgment of Roger Haik's guilt might be delayed until he, Sandys, was beyond seas. He also explained that he had found Leyland and his wife to be in Brighton, through the servants at the "Shanty" which still remained Marcia's property.

* * * * *

"So you see, dear," said Alec, with a smile. "I was innocent after all."

"As if I did not know it," Marcia replied, both hands clasped round one of his arms.

"But, Alec, is there need to publish this poor dead creature's confession? It will be quite enough for *us* to be assured; let the world be satisfied with your acquittal."

"Ever and always the angel of mercy, Marcia! I am content if you are; for I know that your love, dearest, was my true and best justification."

E. Ralph.

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THE BLUE SKIRT.

Jessie Gale was ambitious, immoderately so.

Jack Gale was ambitious, too, but temperately so.

It was because of the varying degrees of their ambition that this story came about.

Jessie could sing. Jack could not. He could only listen with a rare appreciation and adore this particular singer beyond all bounds of her deserts. For Jack was as gifted in the rare art of loving truly as Jessie was in the art of singing. Rather more, I should say.

All this had much to do with the blue skirt, for it was these phsychologic conditions that brought about the incident of the blue skirt.

Jack had always extravagantly admired the gown of which the blue skirt was a component part. He had told her so often, but Jessie had answered rather fretfully that it was "such a simple little affair." Pale blue chambray, made with a blouse effect and trimmed with ruffles edged with narrow torchon. So a woman would have described it, but to sturdy, honest, loving Jack it was a blue cloud flecked with white, from which the black eyes and curling black hair, the red lips and creamy skin of his wife gleamed forth brilliantly.

Jack never forgot the day she tossed it aside.

"I'll never wear that old thing again," she said. "I do hate to wear things when they've grown shabby."

There was a little tremor of sensitiveness in Jack's face as the words struck cruelly upon his ear, but he made a manful effort to conquer it. His income was small, but he was doing his best to increase it, and the increase was sure to come if it was a bit slow. He had told Jessie so often and had explained that there was some disposition to keep the young engineers down.

"The older fellows naturally want to keep the best positions," he said. "Try to be patient, Jessie. I am doing my best, dear."

And Jessie was silent. She had the introspective nature that matches heavy-lidded eyes, habitually cast down. And the habits of silence and introspection were growing.

It was on the evening of the day that Jessie said she had thrown away "the old blue dress" that the great change came.

Jessie heard that a theatrical manager was reorganising a company for a season of comic opera. A neighbour had told her he needed girls for the company—"girls with looks, and with voices if possible, but looks anyway." And Jessie had gone to town and been engaged and had come back and told Jack.

She was a little frightened by his strange silence.

"I did it to help you along—because the money will help us both," she said in defence. Then she burst out into a storm against the manner of their life.

"I hate the solitude here," she said. "Sometimes I feel afraid of the hills. It seems as though they will fall over me and crush me. And the silence here is awful. I want to hear human voices. I want to hear people laugh and sing. I want colour and movement and sound instead of these walls of green making a living tomb for us."

Jack had talked with her very gently and she had answered every argument with bitter protest. He answered her sadly then.

"You are young, dear. I might have known that love would not fill your life now. When you are as old as I am you will know that it is all that really matters, besides working and doing one's duty. I will give my consent to your going, for all I live for is to make you happy."

And Jessie went on her way, singing a small part in a pretty, uncultivated voice. She dressed with half a dozen other girls who smoked and used slang, and in the guise of friendliness "made her up" to distort the beauty of her dark, brooding face. She learnt the disciplinary value of the stage, and she learnt the real hideousness of selfishness. But she told Jack none of this.

One season passed—two—she was soon to begin her third. She was getting on, but slowly. One evening she was moved by one of those impulses that seem to come from without rather than within to run home and pay Jack a visit. The rehearsals were over. There was no reason why she should not go home for a week. She would surprise him.

She drove out from town in the early morning. The mist veils were rising from the hill tops, melted by the burning kisses of the sun. The evergreen forests on the hill sides were so cool, the great walls of earth so restful. She wondered why she was not afraid they would topple upon her now. Was it that she was beginning to yearn for what they typified—strength and fidelity, the greatest and best things in life?

The little house had been done up she noticed as she drove up, and Jack had coaxed the rose vines quite to the roof by now.

The door was open. There was no fear of tramps in that region, and she peered right into the house. She crossed the threshold softly. Some one was stirring within but he was too absorbed to note her soft footfalls.

Her old blue skirt hung upon the wall, and her husband, looking older and sadder, but still with that vast strength of patience in his face, stood looking at it.

She wrote the rest to her one friend in the company.

"I walked over quietly and stood beside him. He was still so busy looking at that foolish skirt that he didn't know I was there. But after awhile he turned towards me, and when he saw me the look that came into his eyes made me cry.

"Well, I've resigned. When I saw poor old Jack worshipping that blue skirt of mine that I had thrown away as worthless, I made up my mind that there are only a few things that are really worth living for, and stage life isn't one of them, and the companionship of a staunch, splendid soul like Jack is. And so I've left and I'm going to wait and work with Jack for the better days that I know are coming.

"He is getting on in his profession and the—did I call them better—the other days are nearer. But I wonder if they will be better, the days when Jack and I are rich, and so many people will know us and make demands upon our time, and so separate us after a manner? We were both wondering to-day, but we are going to enjoy the time before that, and meanwhile that old blue skirt still hangs upon the wall. Jack insists upon it. He calls it his 'restorer.'"

Ida Patterson.

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SERIAL STORY.

Out of Great Tribulation.

By Henry Farmer.

Murder Will Out!

But before the news of his freedom reached Alec Scarsdale, much had happened. The daily papers had furnished forth much sensational reading. In the train, on the top of the 'bus, at the street corner, one was pretty nearly certain to hear the names of Revelle, Crump, and Scarsdale, and perhaps the name that was most frequently mentioned was Crump's.

It was no fault of the little man's that he was thus brought into prominence; but he was undoubtedly the hero of the hour. Sensationalism seemed to have attained its climax when it was made known that Seaton Revelle of The Firs, Warham, a member of several exclusive clubs, and well-known in society, had been arrested; but a yet greater sensation was in store for the British public.

Those present in the police-court when Revelle, livid-faced and looking an old man, appeared before the magistrate, would not forget what happened for many a day. A cheer was suppressed when Crump's name was called out, and a little man, very much bandaged and with only one eye visible, stepped into the witness-box. Crump's successes, in the days of his active service, had in great measure been assisted by the fact that he had kept his personality in the background whenever possible. He had been a name rather than a person.

So this little, grey-headed man was the famous Crump! Those in court saw the livid-faced prisoner lean forward over the edge of the dock, and glare, as though his eyes were playing him false, at the little man in the box.

"Penworthy!" he hissed, half-aloud.

For all his bandages Seaton Revelle had recognised in Crump the landscape gardener and horticultural specialist.

Then the Crown Prosecutor called upon Mr. Crump to tell his story in his own way.

The court listened to him in breathless silence as he gave his evidence, with that modesty so characteristic of him. His evidence commenced with Alec Scarsdale's trial at the Old Bailey, and ended with the arrest of Seaton Revelle.

Then came the great sensation.

Crump had ceased speaking. Again a cheer was suppressed. The little man had won every heart in court. He had unmasked a scoundrel; but he had done more than that. He had proved the innocence of a terribly wronged man.

The spectators watched him, expecting him to leave the box; but he did not stir. The Crown Prosecutor was on his feet again.

"Your Worship," he said, addressing the magistrate, "the principal charge at present against the prisoner in the dock is one of manslaughter. I'm going to ask for an adjournment, after Mr. Crump has given certain evidence, in order that the indictment may be altered, and the prisoner charged with the more terrible crime of murder!"

There was a moment of deathlike silence.

Revelle clutched the dock with both his hands as if to save himself from falling. He had yet hoped to save his neck. Benny Beard had drawn a revolver on him. He had struck him down in self-defence. It had been manslaughter, the counsel for the defence had pleaded, not wilful murder. But now?

The Crown Prosecutor was speaking again.

"A foul murder in no way connected with crimes with which he is now charged, the murder of Alice Balder, known also as Alice Vance and Alice Vince, the prisoner's late wife!"

It was as if a bomb had fallen in the court.

Revelle had reeled back. The constables on either side of him were supporting him now. His bloodless lips were flecked with foam. He was past acting now!

"Now, Mr. Crump," said the Crown Prosecutor, "if you will proceed with your evidence."

Crump beckoned to some constables. Three of them advanced, each bearing a bag of sand ballast.

Then the little man opened the hand-bag that he had with him, and took out a pencilled map, and some fragments of dark, serge-like looking material, and a letter, and a rolled-up scroll that proved to be a small picture poster representing Signor Balderini in the act of making a parachute descent, and a copy of a marriage certificate testifying to a marriage between James Balder and Alice Vince.

"Your Worship," he said, "before giving my evidence I should like to state that there is a witness in court prepared to identify the prisoner as James Balder, *alias* Signor Balderini, the parachutist, and there is another witness who is not at this moment present in court, owing to certain formalities—he is undergoing a brief spell of imprisonment—one Rumbey, a vagrant, who was in Rushford wood on the night that Alice Vance met her death; but he will be forthcoming later. In the meantime I venture to presume that I am in a position to make out a *prima facie* case that will justify an adjournment and a fresh indictment."

Then the little man gave his evidence, stating how his suspicions had been aroused by the position of the poor woman's body in the water, a position that could be only explained by the fact that she must have been dropped into the water; then followed the evidence of the sand-bags, the broken gorse, the fragment of dress, the second fragment found clinging to the fluke of the anchor; then the map with its crosses, and pencilled notes and compass points, was handed up to the magistrate.

And the excited audience whispered among themselves that the homely little man had put a rope round the neck of the death-hued scoundrel who stood in the dock, supported on every side.

But it was so; Rumbey, the vagrant proved the last conclusive link in the evidence when taken in conjunction with Crump's.

He had been in the wood that night of the balloon ascent. He had curled himself up in a hollow tree near the bank when something, seeming to come from the clouds, something dark, fell with a plunge into the water.

The vagrant, knowing of the balloon ascent, had imagined at first that it must have been a bag of ballast. He had wandered away before the discovery of the body, and a bout of drunkenness had followed. Only when he heard of the woman's death had his vague suspicions been aroused, and then perhaps, but for Tom Jackson, he would never have come forward.

After the adjournment of the court, a great crowd waited outside; but the little man for whom they waited, whom in their enthusiasm they would have borne away shoulder

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high, had contrived to effect an escape by a side-exit, and, crouching back in a cab—his expression, what there was visible of it, rather suggestive of a criminal flying from justice—was on his way to the Hotel Royal.

At Last!

How the light sparkled from her dark eyes, how the colour ebbed and flowed on Esther's cheeks as she stood alone in the drawing-room of The Woodlands waiting.

"He is coming, he is coming!"

The birds outside seemed to be singing the words; the very clock—the seconds seemed hours!—was ticking out the words, though the hands must be standing still.

Her fevered, pulsing heart throbbed out the same joyous refrain.

He was coming, he was coming. Her love, her life.

She had never doubted him, never wavered; through the blackness of those awful days, her love, her faith in him, had been the rock to which she had clung, and from which all the storm, all the tempest had not torn her!

She hears the rattle of wheels, the slamming of doors, voices in the hall, her father's voice, the voice of the little man who has been a second father to her; then another voice—his voice!

She is white as death now, white with a great joy, an inexpressible anticipation.

A dimness veils her eyes. She hears the door open, sees something shadowy move towards her; but she feels the strong, trembling arms that encircle her; the mad throbbing of the heart pressed close to hers; the burning lips that shower kisses upon her; and she hears him whisper:

"Oh, God! I thank thee!"

And as the blinding tears—the dew of joy and love—flow down her cheeks, she also whispers:

"Oh, God! I thank thee!"

And love will blot out the memories of the injustice, the cell, and the agony; and love will fill those two hearts again with light and sunshine, soothing and healing and pervading their lives as the sweet perfume of fragrant flowers.

They have passed from out the darkness of their great tribulation. The sky is cloudless now!

They lose all count of time. The greyness of dusk steals into the room. He is only conscious of her presence; she of his.

They do not see the two figures dimly outlined on the threshold of the room—two old men, one, a little man, whose face is no longer bandaged.

"Come!" whispers Crump, in a very shaky voice. "We have seen enough, Mr. Mansfield. This is no place for either of us."

When they have passed away, the little man holds out his hand.

The father wrings it. There are tears in both men's eyes.

"At last!" chokes out Crump. "Thank God!"

* * * * *

The scene has changed!

"Guilty!"

He is standing in the felon's dock, Seaton Revelle, in the very dock in which, not two years back, Alec Scarsdale was standing.

The Judge dons the black cap.

The awful words of doom are spoken.

In all that crowded court, not one look of pity! There is a scream. Revelle, frothing at the mouth, falls to the ground in a fit.

Even in the cell he tries to escape the sentence passed upon him; but the warders are too watchful, and one grey, grim morning, to the gloomy tolling of the prison bell, a half-fainting, livid wretch, supported on either side, is led out to the scaffold.

CONSTIPATION

Mrs. M. Ellis, of Frith Grange Farm, Mill Hill, N.W., writes: "I am glad to be able to inform you of the great benefit derived from a course of your Bile Beans for Biliousness. I have suffered from constipation for years, and months of sleepless nights, with pains in the hands and arms, and swollen joints, with great pain after eating, always feeling dull and heavy, and having tried a number of other remedies to no purpose. I am pleased to say that after taking three small boxes of Bile Beans I enjoy my food, sleep well, and the swelling of joints has disappeared."

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When the black flag flutters out, the crowd outside Newgate knows that James Balder, *alias* Seaton Revelle, *alias* the Marquis, thief, murderer, and coward, has paid the penalty of his crimes.

* * * * *

They sent Tomlinson, *alias* Railton, to penal servitude for five years, on the strength of certain evidence produced by Crump in the shape of designs of Lord Normanhurst's place, The Towers. And Mr. Lewis Masters, turf accountant and receiver of stolen goods, thanks also to Crump, received a similar sentence.

The little man's hope that he would "bag" the lot of them was realised.

An End, and a Beginning.

"Lor', Mr. Penworthy," ejaculated Mrs. Cobb, "I've never seen you look so smart before in my life! Mr. Penworthy you are to me, Mr. Crump, and Mr. Penworthy you will always be. 'Pon my word, you look a perfect picture!"

The little man, his kindly face one big smile, was arrayed in a frock coat, shepherd's plaid trousers, and patent leather boots.

A mighty buttonhole adorned the lappel of his coat. He was struggling into a lavender kid glove.

"Mrs. Cobb," he chuckled, "I am glad that you think the clothes are effective. I am not a dressy person; but to-day—and he chuckled again, and the little eyes twinkled like stars—"but to-day is a great and joyous day! Mrs. Cobb, shake hands!"

And as he was shaking the old lady's hand, the distant jangling of joyous bells fell upon their ears.

"Do you hear them, Mrs. Cobb? Wedding bells, wedding bells! Come, Mrs. Cobb, where's Pollie? We must be getting to the church!"

It was Esther Mansfield's and Alec Scarsdale's wedding-day! They had begged Crump to stay at the Woodlands; but the little man had insisted that he would be in the way, and that at Woodbine Cottage he would be very close.

"Ah, here's Pollie!"

And a few moments later, Mr. Crump, Pollie on one arm, and Mrs. Cobb on the other, was making his way down to the church. And what a crowd there was! All Warham was there, and many more beside.

"There he is, bless him!" said Tom Jackson, nudging Fred Wilton's arm as the little man entered the church.

Then presently all eyes were turned on the man who had appeared at the altar rails, a young man with grey hair—Alec Scarsdale, the one-time convict 35. And men and women were conscious of a strange thrill. The well-groomed young gentleman, the best man, was Gerald Phipps.

Then the organ was pealing out.

Esther, on her father's arm, was passing down the aisle.

"But you mustn't!" whispered Pollie to the little man beside her. "You mustn't cry, Mr. Penworthy!"

For the famous detective, the one-time terror of the criminal fraternity, the man who had fought the notorious Smasher on the housetops, who had clung on to James Balder with a grip of steel, was crying like a child.

And when it was all over, and the bride and bridegroom had passed into the vestry, Mr. Crump would have crept quietly from the church; but it was not to be. He was seized upon by Gerald Phipps, and carried off into the vestry.

And after that, Crump himself was only absolutely certain about one thing that happened—it was so bewildering, owing to the fact that everybody seemed to be wringing his hands at one and the same time, and thanking him, and blessing him—but of this he was and is absolutely certain, that the bride put her arms round his neck, and not only kissed him, but hugged him!

They took the horses from the carriage, and dragged Alec Scarsdale and his bride, cheering all the way, to the Woodlands.

And this time Crump did not escape.

They bore him shoulder-high, cheering all the way, to the Woodlands!

And here—Mr. Crump is absolutely certain of this—he was again kissed by the bride, and his hand ached for days afterwards from the bridegroom's grip!

At the reception he was called upon to make a speech. He himself has no recollection of what he said; but, according to those present, it was a speech which one felt the better for having heard.

* * * * *

Twilight!

The rice has been thrown; bride and bridegroom are gone. Two grey-haired men are standing in the grounds of the Woodlands.

"God bless you, Crump!" says John Mansfield.

"Let us thank God for this day!" whispers the little man reverently.

He is silent for a few moments. The afterglow illumines the sky, and his kindly, gentle face.

"A very happy ending," he whispers presently; "no, not an ending, but a beginning, the beginning of a new life!"

THE END.

[And so the curtain falls on this drama. I hope you have enjoyed it. I hope still more that you will enjoy the new serial story, "A Foe in the Family," which starts on the front page of *Short Stories* this week. At any rate, you will read the first instalment, won't you? It will not take you long, and you can judge then whether you will continue it or not. I have no doubt as to what your decision will be. —ED.]

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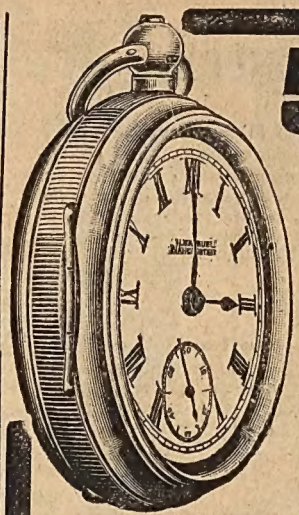

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By Madge Morris.

[I shall be glad to answer, to the best of my ability, any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, of points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to me personally, c/o the Editor of Short Stories.*]*

Cold Beauty.

"Ezra" is in love with a very beautiful girl. But whenever he makes any advances he finds she treats him as rather a bore, though all the time she has professed to return his affection. Is it a trait of very pretty girls to expect all the love-making to be done by the other side, or do I interpret the reason to be that "Ezra" is being deceived by her?

* * * * *

Judge the girl's conduct with others, particularly men, If you find she makes herself peculiarly attractive all round, rest assured that she is probably a flirt who likes you as long as you afford her sufficient sport. After this, it is usual for pretty flirts to allow the man to go where he pleases. On the other hand, if she appears to be generally cold towards others, and reserve is one of her characteristics, continue your campaign, resting assured that you are as favourably regarded as anyone else, and that the odds are in favour of her being really fond of you.

❦

Fair, Fat, and—Sixteen!

"Could you tell me of a cure for fatness?" writes "K. L. L. L." "I am thirty-six inches across the chest, forty round the hips, five feet one inch tall, and am only sixteen years old. I do a great deal of cycling, and have everything I require. As my friends constantly jeer at me for my size, I should be obliged if you could give me a cure."

* * * * *

I observe that "K. L. L. L." has everything he (or she) wants. Perhaps this accounts for his (or her) abnormal size—a too luxurious and adequate diet. Let "K. L. L. L." consistently eat less, avoid all sweetening substances, such as sugar in tea or coffee, confectionery, jam, and the like, also take butter in great moderation, and also be sparing towards such a vegetable as the potato. By the elimination of such things from the diet one can at any rate guard against putting on weight. "K. L. L. L." should continue cycling, and should also go in for walking and active pastimes generally. If such a course does not reduce the annoying bulkiness, "K. L. L. L." had really better see a doctor, for at sixteen certainly such dimensions are not normal.

❦

There Are Worse Things than Ignorance.

"Nancy" is in love with a gentleman who seems to care nothing at all about her. He is a scholar, and in speaking to him, "Nancy" always is conscious of her ignorance. Can I tell her some way to make herself pleasing to him?

* * * * *

If you know that you are inferior to the man in knowledge, by all means avoid trying to appear his equal. There is nothing he would sooner see through than an affectation of knowledge. Just be as natural and agreeable as you can. He will probably like you all the more for your lack of intellectual gifts. Clever men usually seek their sweethearts among any but clever women.

"Eric's" Trouble Settled.

I am very glad to hear from correspondents as to the results of their following any advice I am able to give them in regard to their love affairs. It is a great pleasure for me to hear that my recent advice to "Eric's" sweetheart, who hesitated to marry because of a disablement, has prevailed with her, and that the young couple will soon be united without hindrance.

❦

"Veilchen's" Mysterious Admirer.

"Veilchen."—Thank you for your sympathy in my accident. Do you not think it would be better to try and forget all about the man whose attitude suggests that he has feelings towards you, but who, apparently, has not the courage or resource to try and become acquainted with you? I know it would be very difficult, seeing that you evidently return in some measure his feelings; but, as you say, there might be great disappointment in store for you if you actually got to know him, and the fact that he is much beneath you in social position would much complicate matters. Write to me fully, giving me a description of the man's appearance, probable occupation, and the nature of his conduct when he has seen you; also where you encounter him, and I will try and assist you by some practical suggestion. At present, of course, it is only possible to give you general advice.

❦

Those Changeable Girls.

I have had two letters from correspondents whose troubles seem to be identical, and invite the same solution. Both have been acquainted with girls, whom they had reason to believe were fond of them. Recently, however, they have altered their behaviour for no clear reason. In the case of "Perplexed," the girl now fails to recognise him, and when he taxed her with the fact she replied evasively. He adds that she was at the seaside about two weeks ago. My other correspondent "G. F. C.," complains of almost identical treatment.

* * * *

Now, there appears to be one very probable solution of the matter. In the case of "Perplexed," evidently the girl has decided, perhaps as the result of her seaside visit, that she is no longer fond of him. Probably she met someone else on her holiday who has stolen her heart. "Perplexed" should return her treatment of him in her own coin, and not show himself in any way disturbed by her conduct. If men treated in this way showed a little more pride they would not find women so ready to throw them over at fancy. It is because they show so little power of retaliation that many girls trifle with their affections in this manner. Both "Perplexed" and "G. F. C." should take an independent line. If the girls do not want their society, they should not thrust it on them. No man should make himself a nuisance to any girl. It is neither kind to her nor dignified for himself.

❦

That Over-Rated Question.

"Agnes" wears an engagement ring placed on her finger by "Thomas," and is constantly with him on terms of the greatest intimacy. It has however, just dawned upon her that he has never proposed to her. Can a girl be engaged to a man who has never actually "popped the question"?

* * * *

"Popping the question," "Agnes," is a process to which those who have never been in love attach too much importance. Young people who have taken a fancy to each other from the first, and whose meetings have been those of lovers almost at the outset, scarcely think it necessary to make any formal proposal of marriage. It is taken for granted that at the earliest opportunity the ceremony will take place. No doubt this is how the matter stands between you and your sweetheart. You know you are to be married, just as you know you will get up to-morrow morning. Why then bother about that formal question, which, after all, is only held in such esteem by people not in love?

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